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IMAGINE™ Magazine

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..... **IMAGINE magazine, No 29, August 1985** .....
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..... This month's contributing artists: **Keith Cooper, Ian Williamson, Ian Gibbs, Kevin Hopgood, Pete Young, Brian Williams** .....

Editorial

Say what you like about about **IMAGINE™** magazine, but we do try to be sociable. This month, you can participate in a greater way than ever before. Turn to page 5 for the announcement of a module-writing competition to find the scenario for GamesFair '86. Then flick through to our new inna-zine, **The FanScene**; this issue we introduce you to a number of fanzines, and offer you the opportunity to play a game of **Diplomacy** through **IMAGINE** magazine. We also give young talent the chance of recognition, with a different artist featured each month, some familiar, but others appearing for the first time in any publication. Who knows? Maybe one of them will be you.... Not only that, but you can meet Bob Shaw, author of **Orbitsville** and **Ship of Strangers**. And lastly, the ultimate in fanpower — by popular request, the return of Auchter!

So come on in, this magazine can't get started without you....

Paul Cockburn

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Dealing out the experience points in the **AD&D®** game — some ideas for the level-headed

FOR MONSTERS, TREASURE

and... other things

by Chris Barlow

The scene: A warm cave, an ancient red dragon dreaming of its treasure. Just outside, a party of adventurers quietly plans the next move; Job, Barabous and Asgaroth, a trio of fighters, would attack it with their swords, helped by Frederick – a thief, and Sheba – an out-of-spells magic user. They would be helped by Pliny who would ***bless*** *the party before casting* ***spiritual hammer****, and the* ***magic missiles*** *of Olaf.*

So much for the plan. Frederick failed his Saving Throw and spent his time successfully hiding in the shadows, whilst Asgaroth had a sudden rush of blood to the head and decided that this particular dragon was a bit too big. The dragon just survived the initial onslaught and managed an attack after being so rudely awakened; exit Job.

Still, a rich hoard, lots of treasure for the survivors and they will all be several hundred experience points better off – or will they?

Who Benefits?

In the above example the party's actions are relatively straightforward — they have slain a monster for which the DM will award them a number of experience points. The precise number will have been derived from the rulebooks; usually it will be so many xp for the monster plus so many for each hit point. Later they may also gain experience for the treasure they have acquired; for now, however, concentrate on the slaughter of the dragon. For the purposes of illustration let us assume that the DM decides to award 2100xp. To whom is a share awarded?

The DM could divide the xp equally between **all who were there** — including Frederick hiding in the shadows and Asgaroth the cowardly fighter, the idea being that everybody present learned something from the experience. Thus Frederick, who had never seen a real dragon before, now knows what one looks like, while Asgaroth should be less fearful in future — although the realisation that he too might have been killed had he joined in the attack is also an experience.

Let us call this **Method 1**, under which each participant receives 300xp. Asgaroth and Frederick might receive less gp at the end of the adventure (if any) and so ultimately less xp; this, however, is discussed later on.

Alternatively the DM might decide to award xp to **everybody prepared to take risks**. Frederick would have helped had he been able. Call this **Method 2**. Asgaroth gets no xp, everybody else 350 xp.

Or the DM might award xp only to **those who positively contributed** to bring about the dragon's death. Neither Asgaroth nor Frederick get any experience points, whilst the rest receive 420xp. Call this **Method 3**.

Now the first variation. **Variation A** holds that dying is not too conducive to furthering a character's career. Additionally, since the dead adventurer missed some or all of the fight, less experience would have been gained anyway. Thus, those who die are awarded no xp. Applying this to the above would result in the survivors gaining 350 under Method 1A, 525 under 2A and 420 under 3A.

If this variation is not used, it can be seen as a penalty on the survivors, acting as an incentive for everybody to work together and keep as many of the party alive as possible. This may, however, be too small to outweigh the benefits of fewer party members — larger shares of the treasure for example.

All these methods, used with or without the variation, have the advantage of being simple to operate; the DM determines the amount of experience and divides by the appropriate number. They may, however, be considered too crude to deal with some circumstances or to reflect the effort characters put into an adventure. To account for this, a DM may try to reward characters for what they do.

One method that might be chosen, call it **Method 4**, rewards characters for **doing things that are in keeping with their profession**. A common proviso is that all these activities must be 'actively' pursued during an adventure or similar. A pickpocket will not become a master thief by repeatedly opening the lock on the bedroom door.

A strong argument in favour of such a system is that a character's xp total reflects the skill shown in his or her profession. Under Methods 1-3 it would be possible for a magic user who likes fighting to gain in levels without ever casting a spell during an adventure.

Under this system the fighters would gain xp for slaying the dragon. Pliny and Olaf would gain experience points for casting spells — **magic missile** in the case of Olaf, **bless** and **spiritual hammer** in the case of Pliny, and Frederick might gain xp for hiding in the shadows.

Variation B adapts Method 4 to reward characters not only for actions in keeping with their profession, but for other 'useful' actions as well, in particular slaying monsters. It encourages the likes of Sheba to take an active part rather than feeling she has done her share and now it's the others' turn.

In such cases non-fighters are usually considered equivalent to some fraction of a fighter — a half, say, or a fraction that relates the hit die of the various character classes; thus a cleric would be treated as 75% of a fighter in Basic, 80% in Advanced. Experience is awarded appropriately.

For other characters, the DM may decide to award: 100xp/level of spell for each spell cast (clerical or magic-user); 50xp or 100xp (less the thieves' percentage chance) for thievish functions (backstab may be treated as a thievish skill whether Variation B is in force or not) and 10xp/level of undead turned (skeletons 10xp, zombies 20xp etc). These amounts vary, influenced by the way in which fighters are awarded xp and whether the DM awards xp for gp (discussed below).

With this approach, however, the amount of experience available would be virtually unlimited. Applied rigorously, it would give a magic user 900xp for crushing a distant skeleton under a **meteor storm**. Consequently a limit needs to be imposed, relating xp awarded to actions performed — usually the xp awarded for the monster recently slain.

Thus, for killing a red dragon, 2100xp would be divided amongst the party — regardless of how many spells or other activities (such as moving silently) were performed. The experience for non-fighter activities is awarded: 200xp to Pliny for the spiritual hammer, 100xp to Olaf, and let us say that Frederick's efforts are rewarded with 50xp for successfully hiding in the shadows. This leaves 1750xp for those who took part in 'fighting' the dragon. Method 3 is in effect for 'fighters' as is Variation B, Sheba being considered a half-fighter. Thus Job and Barbarous are each awarded 700xp and Sheba 350xp. Asgaroth again gets no xp.

Obviously there are numerous possible combinations, but by using a little fine tuning

a group can find the balance they feel to be right and should exist between close-in fighting and stand-off spell-casting.

Although slightly more complicated than Methods 1-3, Method 4 provides the basis of a more flexible system for the DM to work with. A paladin overcomes numerous traps (no monsters) to rescue a church's ancient relic from some evil power. The church is poor and can give the paladin nothing but their thanks. Does this mean the paladin gets 0xp (OK, so some of you dislike paladins)? Under Method 4 this type of act can be considered as a professional duty and rewarded accordingly, the DM assessing the degree of difficulty involved.

It is also easier to deal with characters who are not members of a party, but a bunch of individuals, say, out to get whatever they can with minimum risk to themselves — a typical trait of some alignments. This leads on to the effect that a character's alignment/personality can have upon the awarding of experience. If a member of a party stops attacking a monster and turns on a fellow party member for some reason, should the DM penalise or reward the adventurer for acting 'in character'? Should Asgaroth be awarded any experience for deciding that discretion was the better part of valour?

Before discussing this point, however, consider the xps a DM awards for treasure.

For Treasure

Having slain the red dragon, the surviving members of the party pack up the gold coins, jewellery and wondrous items and head for home, leaving the dungeon far behind.

If the DM awards xp for the treasure taken out of the dungeon, commonly 1xp for each gp, then the amount of treasure a character acquires will affect the final xp total of a character. Careful thought should therefore be given to this process.

Experience awarded for treasure is generally assumed to represent the increase in a character's ability that occurs when not adventuring, learning new feints with the sword, new sleights of hand and so on.

Yet a dungeon is far from relaxed and repeating something learned in the comfort of home can be considerably different when the dragon is about to turn you into charcoal. Pressure is the key and one school of thought holds that xp can only be acquired down a dungeon. Thus, one approach is to award no xp for the treasure brought out of a dungeon.

The implications of this are often ignored. If a character is to get no xp for the gp because only in a dungeon does true pressure exist, then a DM should reconsider how 'earned experience' is awarded. A character should gain xp for coping with a new pressure situation — possibly in addition to one of the methods described above, the degree of pressure being related to the degree of danger that the character faces.

For completeness call this **Method 5**, under which a DM awards xp for the **pressures that a character faces**. It is not, however an easy method to apply directly. For example, a 1st level magic user could expect to gain more experience for the casting of a magic missile against a 4th level monster than a 1st level magic user who casts the same spell against a 1st level monster, while an arch-mage should have no trouble casting a **magic missile** even if the threat is overwhelming. You would have to strive to account for a fighter's new moves, a thief's new tricks and so on to do justice to the method. Such an approach is not easy.

An alternative approach, then, is to try and relate the treasure obtained to the dangers that were faced in overcoming it. This again stems from the philosophy of 'real experience' and detracts from the 'money is used to further a character's career while not adventuring' position.

Men and Magic and subsequent rule books have sought to relate the level of the treasure obtained to the level of the dungeon in which it was found. Thus, if monsters twice as tough as those normally assigned to guard a particular treasure were overcome, 2xp might be awarded for each gp. If they were only half as powerful, half an xp.

If the red dragon was sitting upon a pile of treasure worth more than the party ever dreamed of, millions of gp, the DM may decide to award a fraction of an xp. If not, the party will all be high-level adventurers by the time of their next adventure. Will they be as experienced as a group who have taken a goodly number of adventures to reach a comparable level? In some ways, yes — they will, after all, have completed all their training outside the dungeon — and yet in others not. This is why the awarding of a fraction of an xp downgrades the idea that the treasure is used to further a character's career.

Ideally, of course, the adventure should be sufficiently well designed to ensure that a party does not gain more gold than the adventure merits.

Yet even the best-planned dungeons can take unexpected twists. For example, a member of a group nearing the end of an adventure stops to take a stone out of a boot; as far as they know there is no danger. Rounding the corner to catch up, this adventurer discovers the rest of the party, slain. They activated a trap at the entrance, or the lone skeleton standing over them had a run of 20s. Our lone survivor avoids the trap or slays the skeleton and collects the entire treasure that the party had gained. Once again we have the millions of xp situation. This time however — because the dungeon was well designed — the amount of treasure relates to the problems overcome. Does the DM therefore award 1xp for each gp?

Again the feeling of 'real experience' comes into play and the DM modifies the xp awarded. A relatively common approach is to limit the experience that characters are awarded, to ensure that they advance no more than 1 level per adventure (or at a slower rate, if that it what is desired). Any gold gained above that is considered surplus for the purposes of gaining experience.

An alternative is to apply another fraction, equal to the sum of the levels of the survivors divided by the sum of the levels of those who began the adventure. The DM has the choice of using the levels that characters have at the beginning of the adventure or at the end.

This is, if you like, a more subtle cut-off than the 'one level and no more' rule. It still begs the question of whether or not a character who acquires vast amounts of treasure can, as a result, become much more experienced but it does mean that the work of a DM who has carefully matched the treasure and the earned experience that might be gained on an adventure to the likely number of characters/levels is not lost.

The rule also encourages party unity, but if inter-party strife breaks out, the DM may use the total number of levels of a given alignment or grouping when assigning xp.

This second fraction is additional to the first fractional modifier discussed above. A party that defeats monsters whose level is 5 times the treasure they gain, and lose half their number doing so, are awarded $2\frac{1}{2}$xp for each gp ($1 \times 5/2 = 2\frac{1}{2}$).

Dividing the Spoils

A further element that needs to be considered is how the treasure is divided up.

A party may split the non-magical treasure — gold, jewellery, gems — equally between all who survived. Or it may be divided into shares — as many shares as the surviving characters have levels, with each character getting one share per level, a method which helps prevent low-level characters running into the millions of gp problem.

Magical items that are to be sold are usually considered part of the non-magical treasure. If they are to be used, they may be divided into packages of similar worth, with individuals rolling a d20 to decide the order in which characters choose. A modifier (about one and a half per level of character) may be added to the die roll, thus ensuring that the more powerful characters (who will have done the most work) are reasonably rewarded and that low level characters tagging along for the experience are less likely to gain magical items one might consider too powerful for their level.

Other ways of dividing the spoils can be more chaotic and bloodthirsty. Claims to a particular item may also influence how the spoils are divided. Being the first to test an item, for example, is likely to provide a claim. Enforced within a group, it helps prevent stronger characters 'bullying' their weaker comrades.

Lastly, the DM may award xp for acquiring, rather than selling a magic item. If so, this also needs to be taken into account in trying to design a balanced dungeon.

For monsters, treasure and...?

A cleric of good alignment goes to the aid of a wounded and helpless little old man and as a result the little old man lives. A DM may reward the character's actions with xp. Why?

In such situations the DM may not be rewarding the character's compassion and goodly nature — otherwise one might argue that a DM should reward an evil character for slaying a bound and gagged, totally helpless orc. What DMs are usually rewarding is a character's 'willingness' to face danger. That little old man (as many of us know) often turns out to be a formidable foe. It is the same line of thought which leads to Variation B of Method 4.

A DM who does not reward such activity is encouraging a policy of 'if it moves kill it'. A reward need only be made occasionally to discourage this approach. Thus, a DM might award experience to encourage players to act in a way which is 'good' for the game.

Should the DM do such a thing? Is it right that Asgaroth the cowardly fighter should receive no experience?

Many DMs believe that the role-playing aspect should be emphasised. Penalising adventurers for acting 'in character', either directly or indirectly, is not conducive to this desire.

Once more, if xp are awarded for playing in character, the idea that experience represents an adventurer's ability in a particular profession is downgraded. Guidelines, suggesting how much a DM should reward penalise characters in accordance with whether they play in character or not, should be no more than vague, since so much depends on the individual.

A major problem with awarding experience points for actions that are in keeping with a character's personality is that there is only one person who really knows whether a character really deserves such an award — the player who runs that character. Hence at the end of the day only the player can say whether the character should be rewarded, and if not the player should be prepared to ignore some or all of the experience awarded.

It is easier if the DM simply rewards acts of particular note, or a whole series of smaller acts — probably connected with an element of personal risk. 1-200xp may be appropriate, a sum large enough to be of note, but small enough not to upset the general way in which xp is awarded. Such acts must be performed in the course of an adventure as before — a pious cleric, who travels the land giving comfort to the sick when not adventuring, is simply using the treasure he has obtained on a previous adventure (for which experience has probably been given) in pursuit of his profession.

The Final Say?

If you play in a particular group, your characters will have been brought up under a particular philosophy. So will everybody else. When you move to a different group, however, or take your characters with you to a convention, you may find that the DM awards xp differently.

Consider a fighter who has averaged about three adventures per level and now, at 8th level, has a highly detailed personality and a few magic items from having been down so many dungeons. Then the fighter participates in an adventure run by a different DM in a different group. The fighter joins a party that averages about 12th level but still appears to be a formidable character — something that turns out to be the case. At the end of the adventure, the DM awards the survivors about 100,000xp each in total. The player running the fighter is unlikely to be very happy. So much xp for doing what — in comparison to previous adventures — was very little. At this rate the fighter's character is going to get very little opportunity to develop further. After some thought the player decides to reduce the xp to 10,000 instead and goes home much happier.

As a general rule, of course, the DM is always right, but the example illustrates one dilemma a player might face. A DM awarding too little experience does no damage to a player's characters. The player may feel frustrated, but in such cases it is better to grin and bear it and enjoy the game. In cases of too much experience the player may feel justified in reducing the total. Use discretion, however, when having the final say.

In Conclusion

In some groups the amount of experience awarded for the killing of monsters, the casting of spells, and other activities (at the discretion of the DM) is small compared to the amount of experience awarded for the acquisition of treasure — something which may unfairly favour the sly thief who pockets a spare diamond or the thug who slaughters the party at the end of the adventure. This may be balanced by rewarding the good guys for saving the innocent and not the bad guys when they torture a prisoner.

What has to be achieved is a system which feels fair and has a consistency about it. A single DM in a group of players obviously has the best chance of achieving this, balancing all the factors as seems fit. The more DMs a group has (with characters going down each other's dungeons) the harder it becomes.

Flexibility is a cornerstone in the DM's armoury. Yet this very flexibility makes it difficult to achieve a consistent system; the **AD&D®** game is played in so many ways. Nationally, the commonality present in groups allows people to play wherever they happen to find a spare dungeon, but if you do travel, be prepared for local 'quirks' that might be present. How a group goes about awarding earned experience is high on the list of contenders. If you are unsure — discuss the situation first; it often helps and at the very least provides several hours of stimulating conversation!

Chris Barlow

*New readers may be interested in **What to do with a Dragon's Treasure**, #17; **Turnbull Talking**, #18, and the **Letters** column, #20.*

Special Announcement

Some people are waiting for you....

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For the last three years, the **AD&D™ Team Competition** at GamesFair has been one of the highlights of the weekend, as well as being something which everyone else could share in afterwards. Did your players beat their breasts and rattle their spears **For The Honour of the Tribe** (1983 — IMAGINE magazine, #2)? Were they flushed with success after going **Round The Bend** (1984 — #15)? And have they just chased after glory in **The Great Paladin Hunt** (1985 — #26)? Well next year the scenario that drives 'em all crazy could be *yours*.

Yep, Graeme, Jim and Mike have finally reached the end of their tether and are taking a year off from writing the Team Competition module. So what we need is for some other volunteers to come forward, and you look like the right people to us.

Hang on though, don't start writing yet. This isn't going to be as easy as it sounds, and that's why we're offering all these great prizes.

So before you get writing, this is what you need to do. Write to **IMAGINE magazine (GF '86 Competition)**, The Mill, Rathmore Road, Cambridge CB1 4AD, enclosing a stamped, self-addressed envelope of at least 7"x10". We will then send you a leaflet with information about the various things you will have to consider before you write the module; the scoring system, play length, etc. The closing date for sending out the leaflet is **September 15th 1985**.

The next job is to write the scenario, something challenging, witty and fast-moving. Though we will answer technical questions, at this point you are on your own. The scenario must then be sent to us, to arrive no later than **December 1st 1985.**

That's where the fun begins. Before GamesFair in April '86, the winner will be invited to brief the DMs, go through the edits, and help prepare the version that eventually appears in IMAGINE magazine. The results of the competition will be announced to the rest of the world in the GamesFair edition of the magazine in 1986.

Simple, eh? Well, it isn't as straightforward as it sounds, so don't start until you've seen the competition leaflet. Remember, **you cannot enter the competition without sending off for the leaflet first**. So, if you've got what it takes to write the next in this proud sequence of nutty modules send for the form today!

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Eagerly awaited here is FGU's latest offering – 'Flashing Blades.' A historical RPG set in 17th century France. A must for musketeers. FGU have also threatened to release 12 new V&V adventures in 1985. A re-released Swordbearer is in the pipeline along with another RPG – 'Mad Dogs And Englishmen.' A must for mad dogs.

AVALON HILL have released two modules for Dune containing the usual 'spice'; Monster Coliseum for the ever-expanding Runequest 3 system; Perilous Lands and Book of Tables for Powers & Perils. All good solid stuff for expanding existing games.

Victory Games' latest additions to the James Bond RPG range are 'Thrilling Locations' and 'The Man With The Golden Gun'. TL is designed to expand the campaign world; 160pp. Golden Gun details the exploits of Fransisco Scaramanga – the world's most expensive assasin. Watch out for JB 'action episodes' – there are four board games available (8 years and up) – £8.95.

Latest Releases from Grenadier include: Fantasylords 7 (Dungeon Raiders), Fantasylords 8 (Fantasy Knights), Dragonlords 16 (Magic Users), Dragonlords 18 (Female Adventurers) and Dragonlords Dragons 7, 8 & 9 which are Blue, Copper and Bronze. See full lists opposite for details.

Standard Games have taken the plunge and moved into a full role-playing game, it is selling fast and looks to be **DRAGONROAR** one of the most sought-after games in 1985. Complete with cassette containing complete instructions, background and spine-tingling solo adventure. Excellent value at £12.95.

The range of best-selling de luxe dice has received double the colours originally available and a set of six retails for a miserly 95p. Their range has recently been joined by DE LUXE GEM INKED DICE. Six colours are available in each type of die which sell for 25p each or £1.45 for the set.

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ENDLESS GAMES have made massive improvements to their range. All of the excellent Endless Plans now come in sturdy boxes – still at £3.99. **Halls of the Dwarven Kings** combines a top class original Tortured Souls scenario with a Dm's screen, scrolls, maps & NPC stats on floorplans. Great value at £7.95. STOP PRESS – now available the sequel to 'Halls' – The Lost Shrine of Kasar-Khan (£4.95)

The TUNNELS & TROLLS game system has received a boost by the release of the COLOUR range. This includes the rulebook @ £5.95 and the boxed set @ £8.95. Also available – Sea Of Mystery, Beyond The Silvered Pane, Gamesmen Of Kasar, Naked Doom, Deathtrap Equaliser & Captif D'Yvoire. All A4 size at £1.95.

New items from TSR cover just about every aspect of the D&D range. O2 & X8 for Expert, a revised DM's screen, Dragonlance 4 and two new competition modules for AD & D – C3 & C4. Basic is well served with a new module – B8 – and The Book of Marvelous Magic (AC4). This is a very useful add-on containing 500 new magical items not contained in the 3 boxed sets.

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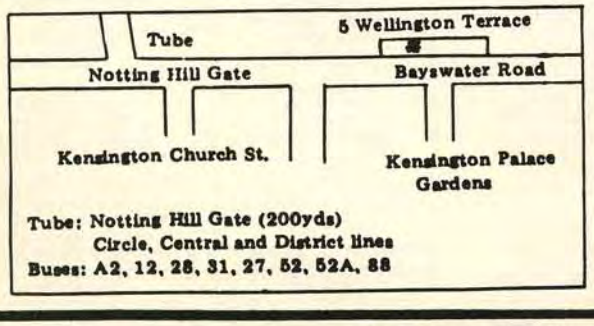

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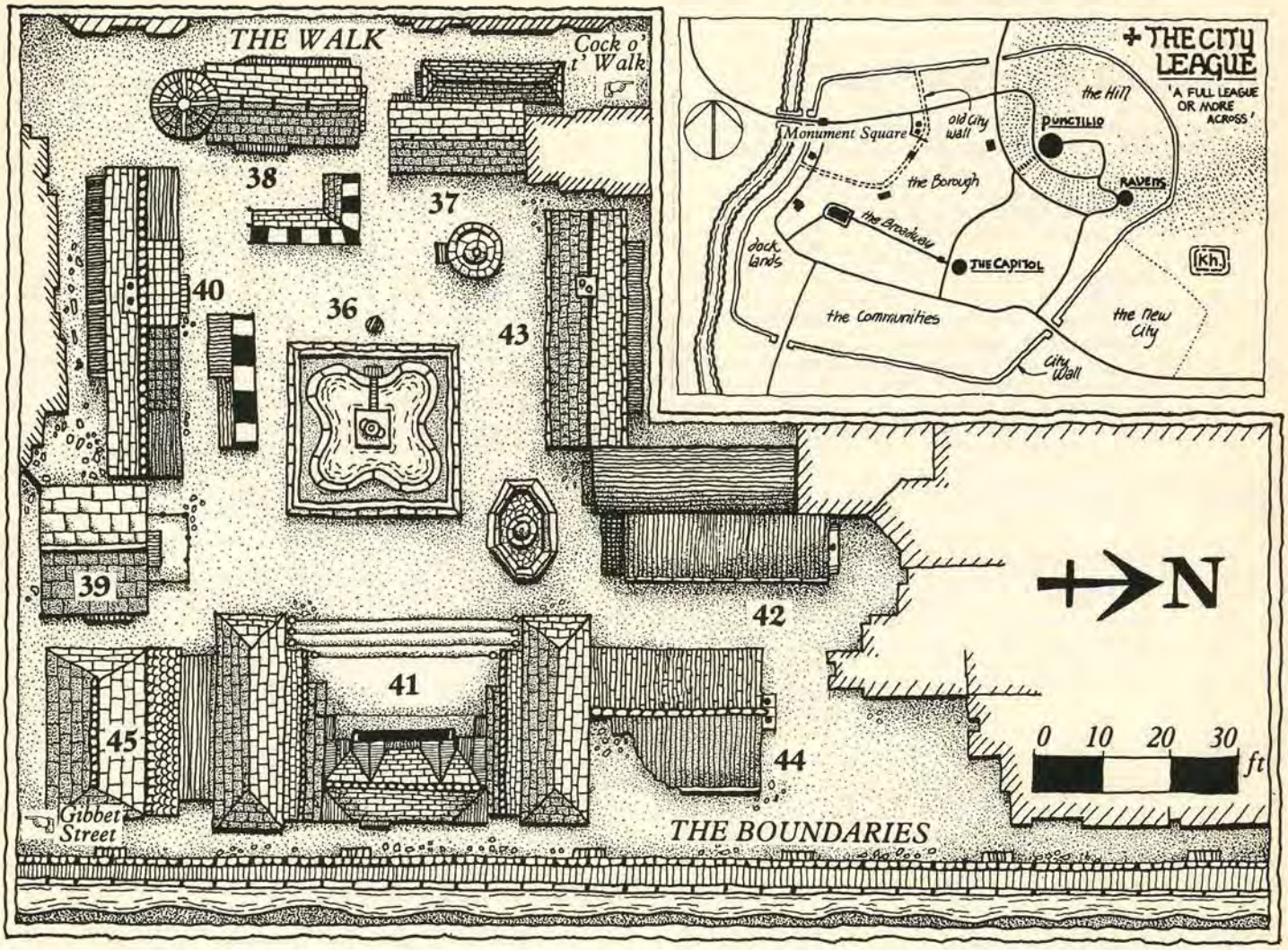
by Brian Garrod



The Square

Monument Square is a paved court situated within and adjacent to the old city walls. It was built in honour of the construction of the walls and the bringing of law and order to the City League. Now it stands a mocking testimony of the area's downfall; the stonework scored and vandalised, the flagstones cracked and mossy, the sanctuary in ruins.

36. The Water Pump and Pools

Clean, drinkable water is in short supply in this area of the league, the streams' water is dirty and the nearest fresh water a good distance away. Residents must pay for their water. The water-seller is either Mandren (**27a**) or Solchar (**36a**) who sits on the stool provided awaiting custom. Since the water pressure below has long since diminished, pumping water can be a long and arduous task. For only a few extra coppers the water-seller will provide this service, however.

36a

Solchar Na-baroth; M; Fr1; N;
No weapon; AC 8; hp 2

H	
S	17
I	19
W	14
D	15
C	14
Ch	6

- ☐ *Looks too old and weak to pump water, but in fact well muscled and agile; wears ragged robes and a battered felt hat; face covered in warts and boils*
- ☐ *Water-seller*
- ☐ *Alert, constantly ready to please, avaricious and cunning but harmless*
- ☐ *Friendly with Mandren when she is sane; knows each customer by name*

The Statue

The statue honours peace, law and order, and sits on a graffiti-ridden sandstone plinth. The figure, cast in a bronze alloy, is of a robed woman bearing a sheathed sword and a large law tome. Her right hand is raised, palm forward, in what was originally a sign of peace; two of her fingers have since been broken off, and her hand now seems to be conveying some sign or message.

The Sanctuary

The Sanctuary's use has been all but forgotten. The locals consider it to be just another monument or perhaps a shelter for travellers or waifs. The roof was once thatched — and still is, after a fashion. Periodically (though not in the lifetime of the inhabitants), it is rethatched secretly by night. Those who look closely will see the word 'Abazar' in magical script on the central stone pillar. If a person of good alignment, able to read the scrawl, pronounces this word loudly, the Sanctuary is surrounded completely with a **protection from evil 10' radius**. The spell can be triggered but once a day, lasting for 12 hours, and if the pillar is removed the Sanctuary will no longer function.

Flanche's Stall

Flanche sells fowl at extremely cheap prices. Unfortunately much of the 'chicken', 'turkey' and 'goose' is in fact rabbit meat, which has been moulded into fowl-shaped cuts! Still, Flanche does say it's the fact that it's cheap that's important!

36b Flanche Longbourne; M; F 4; N/CN;
Broadsword and dagger; AC 5; hp 19/21

H
S 13
I 14
W 10
D 10
C 12
Ch 14

- ☐ *Wears chainmail under his white smock; bald, no eyebrows, sharp black eyes*
- ☐ *Foul fowl seller, ex-adventurer*
- ☐ *Self-conscious about his complete lack of hair after a nasty experience with a high-level evil cleric in his adventuring days; bad tempered, mean and spiteful but silver-tongued and quick-witted.*
- ☐ *Only Eblon (**37a**) will be his friend*

Sorrow and Morritta's Stall

Morritta sells sweetmeats and confectionery from the stall whilst Sorrow, her husband, keeps on the move with his advertising yell and tray of hot pies.

36c Sorrow Moonfist; M; Fr 3; L/LG;
Shortsword; AC 9/10; hp 5/6

G
S 10
I 10
W 14
D 11
C 8
Ch 12

- ☐ *Dressed in white shirt and breeches, carries a tray slung around his neck and yells the nature of his business intermittently; thin for a gnome, but rosy cheeked*
- ☐ *Confectioner and pie vendor*
- ☐ *Always weary and in a hurry; appears nervous and edgy about anyone new in the locale; sometimes seems a bit over-cheerful; inquisitive*
- ☐ *Knows something about absolutely everyone local; husband of Morritta (**36d**)*

36d Morritta Moonfist; F; Fr 2; L/LG;
No weapon; AC 9/10; hp 4/5

G
S 12
I 14
W 9
D 10
C 11
Ch 13

- ☐ *Dressed in white pinafore and grey frock; curly brown hair and bright, cheerful green eyes; very short and thin*
- ☐ *Sweet seller*
- ☐ *Ignores comments about her diminutive height; generally cheerful and chatty - often too chatty to allow her husband to say anything!*
- ☐ *Wife of Sorrow (**36c**) and knows everyone he knows*

Sanbow's Stall

Sanbow is a kindly old lady who cultivates pot plants in her window and sells them on the square. She will always recommend her favourite to interested customers, a fern-like pale green plant she calls 'Elephants Thumps' — she doesn't know why, which is a mercy since little does she know that the plant is in fact a mild narcotic.

36e Sanbow Goodhern; F; Fr 1; L/LG;
No weapon; AC 10; hp 3/5

H
S 11
I 7
W 9
D 7
C 15
Ch 12

- ☐ *White-haired, plump, slow mover due to arthritis; wears a crocheted shawl over a green wool dress*
- ☐ *Pot plant seller*
- ☐ *Old-fashioned and set in her ways; would be horrified to learn the true nature of her favourite plant*
- ☐ *Prefers not to associate here*

37. Eblon's Junk Shop

Business is especially brisk for the time of year and the shop sprawls out onto trestles in front of the shop. Eblon, the proprietor, buys and sells most items — the price depending on the likely demand, and 'providing that it isn't stolen' (of course)! Any item bought from Eblon is 10% likely to be special in some way — ornate, shoddy, faked or even magical — however items are also 25% likely to be stolen considering Eblon's and his daughters' trade — thievery!

37a Eblon Fairlorn; M; T6; C/CN;
Shortsword, dagger and darts; AC 8/9; hp 22/32

H
S 7
I 16
W 11
D 15
C 16
Ch 9

- ☐ *Weasely and wiry. Lank, copper coloured hair and long fingered, nail sharpened, greedy hands; dressed in grey robes*
- ☐ *Junk trader and thief*
- ☐ *Innocent mannered, appears absent minded, speaks harshly and fond of sarcasm and black humour; genuinely caring of his daughter, Joll (**37b**)*
- ☐ *Father of Joll (**37b**); friendly with Flance (**36b**); member of local thieves' guild.*

37b Joll Fairlorn; F; T3; C/CE;
Longsword and daggers; AC 3/4; hp 9/16

H/½O
S 14
I 14
W 12
D 14
C 11
Ch 6

- ☐ *Plain looking (plain ugly!), large red nose, hardly a patch of clear skin under freckles, moses and warts! Not a child gifted with beauty. Wears a baggy red frock and a cheap leather choker **bracer of defence AC 4**.*
- ☐ *Thief and occasional houri*
- ☐ *Flaunting and always being ridiculed for it; conniving, scheming and hateful; does not know her true race - her mother burdened Eblon with her as a child and departed - but the breeding certainly shows!*
- ☐ *Daughter of Eblon (**37a**) and an unknown orc-woman; knows everyone who mostly either chastise or ignore her (or laugh and bitch behind her back); sometimes disappears with her father or Flanche (**36b**) and returns with a full purse!*

38. The Folly Tavern

When Jarrow Downson, a rich merchant, decided to build himself a townhouse three centuries ago, he also decided, in his famed eccentric way, to include a four-storey tower! However, as the tower rose his business and wealth declined and he died a pauper. His descendants were left only the house, so this they converted into a tavern and local building of interest. His descendants still run the tavern today. Tanner and his sister, Jerris, have lived here since they were born and expect their respective children to continue the family business. The tavern is in the tower itself, with its all-round view and central, spiral staircase. It would make an excellent lookout post — for those who might need one.....

38a Tanner Downson; M; F4; L/LG;
Broadsword; AC 9; hp 22/29

H
S 18^{21}
I 13
W 9
D 15
C 16
Ch 13

- ☐ *Middle-aged but tall and broad shouldered; well muscled and well proportioned; wickedly handsome - black hair and sharp blue eyes; dresses in leaf green shirt and blue trousers*
- ☐ *Stockman/chucker-outer and would-be adventurer*
- ☐ *Usually jovial and jaunty; humorous but sometimes moody - especially when he is arguing with the two ladies in his life, Charmail (**38b**) his wife and Jerris (**38c**) his sister, over his continual wish to go adventuring, like he did when he was young, rather than stay and run the tavern*
- ☐ *Makes it his business to know every customer by name; few friends*

38b Charmail Downson; F; Fr2; L/LG;
No weapon; AC 9/10; hp 5/12

H
S 8
I 14
W 10
D 11
C 16
Ch 16

- ☐ *Slender, blonde and voluptuous; dresses in a sky-blue gown and broad leather belt*
- ☐ *Barlady*
- ☐ *Flirtatious, enjoys being chatted up and pandered to, but faithful to her husband; shares Tanner's sense of humour, but not his view that adventuring, not barkeeping, is the road to riches*
- ☐ *Knows most regulars - especially the men; very fond of Tanner (**38a**) and Jerris (**38c**).*

38c Jerris Downson; F; Fr3; L/LG;
No weapon; AC 9/10; hp 8/11

H
S 13
I 10
W 17
D 14
C 10
Ch 14

- ☐ *Middle-aged, plump, masses of curly black hair; dressed in mauve and blue marquee-like dress!*
- ☐ *Barlady and manageress*
- ☐ *Henpecks her brother even more than this wife - but all three still get on like a house on fire; worldly-wise and understanding; heart of gold*
- ☐ *Knows everyone local who come to her with their problems - a local agony aunt*

38d Moridbar Downson; M; F1; C/CN;
Scimitar and shortsword; AC 7/8; hp 6/9

H
S 10
I 12
W 14
D 16
C 13
Ch 14

- ☐ *Teenage son of Tanner and Charmail, unkempt, slim and slovenly*
- ☐ *Supposed to help with the tavern but rarely obliges!*
- ☐ *A prodigal son in so many ways; a loner and a taker rather than an earner or a sharer; prepared to entertain any proposition that sounds profitable*
- ☐ *No friends*

Regulars at the Inn

38e Arribund Cracey; M; ½/Fr1; N/CN;
Daggers; AC 8/9; hp 4

½

S	12	☐ *Dresses in brown breeches, white shirt and an embroidered waistcoat; sandy hair and snub nosed*
I	15	
W	6	☐ *Information gatherer and seller cum storyteller*
D	15	☐ *Sharp eared, greedy, invents stories and information snippets to please punters and take their money!*
C	11	
Ch	13	☐ *Knows about everyone local; only friend is Tarand (**38f**)*

38f Tarand; M; E3/T3-MU2; N;
Longsword and darts; AC 7/8; hp 12/8

E

S	13	☐ *Shaven head, green eyes; wears grey robes*
I	12	☐ *Freelance spy and lookout*
W	13	☐ *Preoccupied, vacant, but once his attention has been gained sharp tongued, spiteful and vindictive; self-centred and greedy*
D	16	
C	9	
Ch	9	☐ *Knows various guild members who provide work*

Spellbook:
D&D 1:(1, 3, 6, 7, 9) 2:(1, 5, 6, 9, 10)
AD&D 1:(3, 16, 20, 22, 27) 2:(2, 9, 10, 15, 19)

38g Leganni; M; Fr3; N;
Longsword and club; AC 7/8; hp 10

H

S	13	☐ *Dusty robes, balding, weary traveller type*
I	10	☐ *Clothing trader*
W	15	☐ *Mild mannered; here on business from outside the City League, interested in clothing bargains but not selling; now a doppelganger, ugly tempered, clever and cunning*
D	11	
C	11	
Ch	13	☐ *No contacts – it's eaten them all!*

DMs' Note: *Leganni is a doppelganger, posing as the trader*

38h Vardum T'Manion; M; Dw3/F3; L/LN;
Battleaxe and light crossbow; AC 5; hp 15/19

Dw

S	17	☐ *Fat, stumpy and heavily bearded; wears his chainmail openly and with pride; sits in the corner quaffing beer; appears permanently drunk.*
I	10	
W	10	
D	11	☐ *Ex-gladiator, seeking employment as a bodyguard*
C	13	☐ *Gruff but friendly if treated with due respect.*
Ch	14	☐ *Although he has little money, he is very generous with it (unusual for a dwarf) and holds few grudges except to Tarand (**38f**) who's not only a 'damned elf' but a 'sorcerous warlock' too; everyone knows him, but he does not admit to knowing any of them!*

39. Jacrond's House

The house has a balcony and a secret cubby-hole beneath the stairs; this hides Abol, an assassin whom Jacrond is hiding. Jacrond is a mercenary, working for and believing in any cause which pays him well. He used to be a travelling acrobat and is famous locally for his spectacular rooftop escapes from brushes with the law.

39a Jacrond Bortell; M; T7/Ac7; N/CN;
Staff and daggers (inc **dagger +1, +2 vs humanoids**); AC -1/-2; hp 21/34

H

S	16	☐ *Greying beard, hooked nose, dark eyes; wears leather jerkin and black trousers; **ring of protection +2***
I	13	
W	8	☐ *Mercenary thief-acrobat*
D	18	☐ *Cunning and quick-witted; agile and graceful; seems jumpy, especially if armed and armoured adventurers knock on his door! Famed for rooftop escapes*
C	13	
Ch	10	☐ *Occasionally hired by local Thieves' and Assassins' Guilds; knows a few local mobsters, eg Arribund (**38e**) and Tarand (**38f**); hiding Abol (**39b**) from the Law*

39b Abol Noftin; M; T4/A4; C/LE;
Hammer and dagger; AC 7/8; hp 15/16

H/½O

S	13	☐ *Still dressed in his last disguise of a blacksmith; leather apron, thick blackened wool trousers, boots and dirty yellow shirt; brown snaggled hair and protruding cleft chin; **ring of protection +3***
I	13	
W	14	
D	14	☐ *Freelance assassin*
C	13	
Ch	6	☐ *Thoroughly nasty and bullying; presently especially on his guard, devious and manipulative*
		☐ *Only local contact is Jacrond; member of a distant Assassins' Guild*

40. Lilith's Home

This house shows signs that it was once partially burned and then shoddily repaired; about five years ago now, when Lilith was eighteen, her house was mysteriously set alight. Local legend has it that vigilantes believed the entire family to be witches and consequently converted the house into a pyre. Lilith escaped with terrible burns and total blindness.

40a 'Lilywhite' Lilith; F; Fr2; N/LN;
No weapon; AC 9/10; hp 6

H

S	9	☐ *Scars from the right side of her face to the small of her back, long black hair obscuring the worst (treat as Ch 6 on first sight); staring pale eyes; wears a grey gown*
I	11	
W	15	
D	12	☐ *Because of her blindness, her other senses are acute and she thus hires herself out as a guide occasionally*
C	14	
Ch	15	☐ *Moody and brooding, intent on revenge, eccentric, calculating and deliberate*
		☐ *Ostracised; knows everyone locally by sound and smell*

41. The Laundry

This building comprises of the various laundry pools, several washing lines (which some say are holding the place up!) and the home of the launderers, Mailicea and Chove, and their adopted (halfling) son, Ramal. Chove was a successful adventurer until he fell in love with Mailicea.

41a Chove; M; MU3/I3; L/NG;
Dagger; AC 6/7; hp 7

H

S	11	☐ *Wears white smock and green breeches; skullcap and **ring of protection +1**, long moustache and sideboards*
I	15	
W	11	☐ *Launderer*
D	16	☐ *Although he badly wants to, does not adventure – "I'm a married man now"; determined, resolute and caring*
C	9	
Ch	14	☐ *Husband to Mailicea (**41b**), friendly with many magicians from the MU school*

Spellbook
D&D 1:(1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10) 2:(1, 4, 9)
AD&D 1:(3, 4, 12, 20, 22, 23, 27) 2:(2, 6, 15)

41b Mailicea; F; Fr2; L/LG;
No weapon; AC 9/10; hp 4/6

H/½E

S	8	☐ *Slender – almost boney, thin face with sad grey eyes; wears a pastel shaded gown and a headband*
I	13	
W	14	☐ *Launderess*
D	14	☐ *Shy and very timid, speaks softly if at all; once she is confident however; chatty, humorous and sparkle-eyed*
C	9	
Ch	17	☐ *Knows only her family*

41c Ranal; M; Fr1; L/LG;
Shortsword and dagger; AC 8/9; hp 2/4

½H

S	13	☐ *Wears brown trousers and blue shirt; usually seen pulling the huge wicker delivery basket on a trolley that appears far too heavy for him*
I	14	
W	12	
D	15	☐ *Delivery halfling*
C	10	☐ *Chatty, cheeky, helpful, inquisitive and cheerful; prone to enjoy rather too much wine than is good for him when his traits are usually extenuated*
Ch	11	
		☐ *Knows his adopted parents and everyone local, especially the laundry customers helpful enough to give his basket a push when he's going uphill; dislikes Arribund (**38e**) who is the bad apple in the barrel of halflings*

42. Scribes' Workshop

Tambor and his large family live here. Tambor, the scribe, has a fair mastery of most of the human, demi-human and humanoid languages and can translate, dictate and compile or prepare legal documents. His wife, Ariana, concerns herself with the manufacture of paper and the preparation of quills and inks.

42a Tambor Inis; M; Fr5; L/LG;
Swordstick; AC 9/10; hp 12/18

H

S	12	☐ *Elderly, bearded and becoming shortsighted and deaf; wears a blue shirt and breeches*
I	17	
W	14	☐ *Scribe*
D	14	☐ *Testy in his dotage but kind at heart; eager to see his eldest son, continue as a scribe in the family business.*
C	12	
Ch	14	☐ *Knows buyers and family; Sanbow (**36e**) is an old flame*

42b Ariana Inis; F; Fr3; L/LG;
No weapon; AC 9/10; hp 9/8

H
S 10
I 13
W 10
D 11
C 12
Ch 10

- ☐ *Spindly frame, white hair tied in bun; primly dressed in mauve frock and yellow scarf*
- ☐ *Scribe's assistant*
- ☐ *Suspicious and nosey, sometimes a gossip-monger; usually helpful and kindly, good natured; calls everyone 'deary'*
- ☐ *Friendly with Jerris (**38c**); wife of Tambor (**42a**)*

42c Dolgan Inis; M; F2; N/CG;
Broadsword and shortsword; AC 6/5; hp 10/16

H
S 14
I 8
W 12
D 7
C 15
Ch 16

- ☐ *Lean and handsome, wears chainmail and his swords openly and proudly; straw coloured hair and strong chin; extremely tall*
- ☐ *Swordsman*
- ☐ *A young man full of ideals: would rather champion the cause of good than take over the family scribing business – in any case he's too clumsy to write neatly and never got the hang of languages; strong willed and stubborn; tends to bottle up feelings until they burst free in a cataclysm of emotion*
- ☐ *Friendly with Tanner (**38a**) whom he admires; first son of Tambor (**42a**) and Ariana (**42b**); also has contacts among the fighters at the Arena and the Punctillan; several drinking friends in numerous Inns*

42d Egrin Inis; M; Fr2; L/LG;
Dagger; AC 9/10; hp 4/8

H
S 11
I 16
W 14
D 13
C 9
Ch 9

- ☐ *Plain and uninspiring to look at; grey smock conceals a fast growing and premature paunch for 22 years of age, green trousers and blue woolly hat*
- ☐ *Assistant scribe*
- ☐ *An excellent scribe despite his father's wishes for Dolgan to be the best; friendly but deadpan; wrapped up totally in his work; second son of Tambor and Ariana*
- ☐ *Too busy for friends*

42e-h
Balgor, **Sandom** and **Chorrin** are adolescent sons ranging in age from 10 to 15; **Lora** is Tambor and Ariana's only daughter, presently she has a crush on Moridbar (**38d**).

43. Empty House

This house is presently between owners but is not uninhabited. Nicton, a vagrant no-hoper, shares the back room with a multitude of rats, cockroaches and woodworms.

43a Nicton; M; T2; C/CN;
Club and dagger; AC 9/10; hp 9/11

H
S 10
I 14
W 13
D 14
C 17
Ch 8

- ☐ *Unkempt, dirty and unsavoury; long snaggled hair matted into a ponytail; dresses in rags*
- ☐ *Dosser and thief-at-last-resort*
- ☐ *Lazy and willing to break every moral code to turn an easy copper; scheming, disgusting and, probably, a bit crazy*
- ☐ *Knows only Moridbar (**38d**) who sometimes supplies him with food and other things in exchange for thieving tips and tall stories*

44. Kaili's Trinket Shop

Kaili, a weird old man, claims to be everything from a seer to a spellbinder to a creator of magical trinkets; most locals think that he's a fraud — and they're right, he is!

44a Kaili Torsin; M; MU2; N/CN;
Dagger; AC 9/10; hp 5/6

H
S 9
I 13
W 9
D 8
C 15
Ch 9

- ☐ *Wizened, bushy eyebrows, wild white hair, balding, crooked nose; walking stick he claims to be a wand, black robe, embroidered with stars, acts crazy*
- ☐ *Magician and more often than not creator of fraud magic; a failed magician – too clumsy by half!*
- ☐ *Brilliant actor, mystical air about him, greedy but spendthrift; pretends to be insane or perhaps in dotage*
- ☐ *Ex-member of MU school; prefers to keep to himself*

Spellbook:

AD&D 0:(Cantrips only)

45. Mindon the Merchant's House

Mindon is a buyer and seller of metals in all forms and of all descriptions. He does not have anything to do with the actual trading, just the bargaining and the eventual deal.

45a Mindon Bord; M; Fr7; L/LN;
Battleaxe and dagger; AC 4; hp 20/30

Dw
S 12
I 14
W 14
D 11
C 17
Ch 13

- ☐ *Dresses in fine **chainmail +1**, wears browns and greens including a feathered brown cap, long white beard and steely grey eyes*
- ☐ *Merchant*
- ☐ *A bureaucrat at heart, haughty, business like, professionally greedy, covetous, a hard bargainer and an upright, moral, stalwart citizen of The League*
- ☐ *Husband to Sorahz (**45b**); dislikes Eblon (**37a**) intensely and absolutely detests Eblon's daughter, Joll (**37b**); claims to have a son practising as a merchant in every major city in Pelinore*

45b Sorahzh Bord; F; Fr4; L/LG;
No weapon; AC 9/10; hp 10/11

Dw
S 14
I 14
W 10
D 9
C 13
Ch 11

- ☐ *Dresses in a mauve frock with a jewelled belt; hair in pigtails and beard neatly plaited*
- ☐ *Book-keeper*
- ☐ *Haughty and proud; standoffish and never interferes; sharp tongued especially towards persons who make fun of her splendid beard; seems sour and unhappy; diehard romantic.*
- ☐ *Wife to Mindon (**45a**) and mother of many in her time; secretly admires Vardum (**38h**) often wishing that her Mindon was a great warrior instead of a successful business dwarf*

Plotlines

1. Player characters are most likely to end up living in the environs of Monument Square only if they fall on hard times. With the exception only of the New City, the Square is one of the cheapest places to live in the City. Otherwise, their most likely contact is Eblon Fairlorn (**37a**), whose junk shop is a suitable outlet through which to sell the cheaper treasures found while adventuring. Any item worth 50gp or more can be sold to Eblon for half the listed price if a succesful charisma check is made; otherwise he will only offer a quarter of the value. He is an expert bargainer, and very difficult to cheat.

2. Tanner Downson (**38a**) is very likely to be friendly to adventurers who come to the Folly. He will want to hear of their adventures; particular the treasure they found. He might even sound them out about taking him along. This might have some advantages for the right sort of party; Tanner will offer rooms in the tower, as secure a hiding place as can be hoped for. But should anything ever happen to him, the adventurers might wish they had never heard of him. Charmail (**38b**) loves her husband very much, and she is resourceful and wealthy enough to make life miserable for the party, bribing Law officers to arrest them, cajoling local toughs to rob them — and if all else fails, hiring Abol Noftin (**39b**) to exact revenge.

3. None of the regulars of the Folly are anything to admire — except, seemingly, Leganni (**38g**). So, when a brawl breaks out in the barroom, it's going to be quite a feast — with a little sting in the tail. The lights are relit, and the damage assessed — and suddenly Leganni has disappeared! The doppleganger will have killed and disposed of the body of one of those present, and have taken his or her form. Just how this is going to work out when the District Militia arrive is anyone's guess!

4. Lilith's injuries are terrible — but a cleric of a high enough level can do much to restore her to full health. If the adventurers are in any way responsible, Lilith will tell them the fact she has kept to herself for five years — she knows the face of one of the vigilantes who killed her family and burned her home. If the adventurers help her pursue the villain, who will they find? And what will they do when they find that the vigilantes will do anything to keep their actions a secret?

5. A book is found; and suddenly everyone's attention is focused on this backwater. Property developers, City magnates, the Katar.... people with power — all want to buy the Square. For the book shows how a building can be constructed over the Statue in such a way that the **protection from evil** extends to the whole building. What a prize! And with just a few scrubby houses and shops to get rid of, what is there to stop a ruthless purchaser from doing exactly what he likes?

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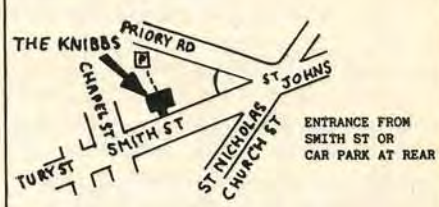

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ILLUMINATIONS

The Game of the Film of the Book

Quantities of Victory Games' adventure module, **A View To A Kill**, have arrived in the cavernous warehouses of TM Games, and are even now being relayed throughout the nation. We are talking here, of course, about the latest **James Bond 007** role-playing game module, the appearance of which is neatly sandwiched between the film's UK premiere and its general release to a cinema near *you*. TM are offering cinema managers the opportunity to take part in a promotion; they will provide copies of the James Bond 007 basic game as prizes for any exhibiting cinema willing to run a competition in conjunction with the screening of the film.

What the average member of the picture-going public will make of the game is an intriguing question, but perhaps there is a chance here for gamers to nip in and lift the prizes. It's a bit difficult to pass on any advance information which may assist potential competitors, since each cinema manager will devise his or her own competition, but doubtless whatever they come up with will be well within the capabilities of your average gamer — so it ought to be a snip.

A few other snippets from TM; **Heroes** #5 has been in the shops for a week or so. This house mag for Avalon Hill and Victory has plenty of stuff for devotees — gambling in **Runequest** and James Bond 007; languages for those of you who are licensed to kill; details of the capital city of Donara (a **Powers & Perils**) setting; and, as they say, much more.

TM Games are now the proud owners of **Endless Games**, which has the first of its new products coming out under the control of TM. These are a full range of hex pads, with a wide variety of different size hexes available — all the usual types, including a 'planner' type (a large hex overprinted onto a 5mm hex grid). Some pads of squares are also available. OK, so it's not terribly original or exciting, but it's a start. Also planned are fantasy scenarios based on the **Endless Plans** series of floor plans, and a clear, acetate sheet designed to be overlaid onto these plans, providing an easy-to-read ground scale. It is hoped that these embellishments will boost the less-than-sensational sales of the Endless Plans series.

Ice-Tech

Another tightly-packed volume from Iron Crown Enterprises (ICE) plopped — no, sorry, *crashed* — through my letter box recently. 96 pages of detailed rules caused a significant disturbance of the Cowie doormat. The 1985 version of **Tech Law** (I think there was an earlier edition) had arrived. Well-produced, overflowing with rules, charts, background, systems, explanations of hi-tech jargon — in short, a must for all SF hardware freaks. It covers "all types of combat in a Science Fiction environment from personal.... weapons to starship laser and disruptor banks." Also included are rules for designing spacecraft and other vehicles, robots, androids and living organisms. There's plenty more, some of it esoteric, such as the mathematical formulæ that were used to calculate the turn/velocity ratios in the Starship Turn Table. Tech Law is designed to be an SF module which enables ICE's fantasy games (**Middle Earth** and **Rolemaster**) to be converted to SF games. If the notion of galaxy-spanning hobbits is too much for you, ICE are also to publish **Future Law** which will be a companion to Tech, the two volumes combining to form a complete system.

Monopoly on Vallejo

A concluding look at some of th ıayfair Games' current range reveals **Shadows of Evil**, a fantasy suppl ıent 'suitable' for the **AD&D™** game. Shadows gives some background on Celtic culture and Druids, plus a couple of related 'major' adventures. Liberally supplied with maps and plans, and featuring, as is customary with Mayfair, a Boris Vallejo cover. **Fantastic Treasures** is 95 pages of 'enchanted treasures and items from the myths of all ages'; scores of weapons, treasure and artifacts are arranged alphabetically, described in game terms and provided with background notes. The first entry is Aaron's Rod (biblical), but seeing as the final one is Lychis (illuminating stones), I take it that Mayfair are considering a sequel....

Four fantasy adventures complete the selection of Mayfair role-playing items I have to hand. These are **Question of Gravity** (3-8 characters, 2nd-5th level); **Evil Ruins** — 'an ancient terror among timeless ruins' (4-8 characters, levels 2-5); **Throne of Evil** — 12th century England (4-6 characters, levels 4-6); and **Final Challenge**, a solo module which invites you to defeat the cunning of the wizard, the powers of the lycanthrope, the evil of the undead — all of this while clad only in a pair of underpants, assuming the cover has any relevance.

We've mentioned before how Mayfair specialise in 'based on' boardgames. **Hammers Slammers** is a tactical, SF armoured combat game with the look of **Ogre** about it, although the components are vastly superior. According to the box, it's easy to learn. **The Company War** is from C Cherryh's *Down Below Station*; interstellar combat at strategic and tactical levels. I admit to being unfamiliar with both these books — for that matter neither of the authors has come to my attention before. But they must be talented individuals producing work of great moment, or Mayfair would not have gone to the bother of producing the games, would they?

Finally, if you're tired of all this SF/F gaming, you can always try Mayfair's **Fic-tio-nar-y**, a 'trivia boardgame'. 2000 definitions from the American Heritage Dictionary. What do you reckon? No? No, well I can't say I blame you.

Transatlantic Tales

The warehouse people at TSR UK must love months like these. Boxed sets are arriving in this sunny realm in profusion, and the summer promises to be one in which a visit to your local games shop will be well worthwhile.

The arrival of the **AD&D™ BATTLESYSTEM™** fantasy combat supplement, the **Unearthed Arcana** book and the **CONAN®** role-playing game have been predicted in this column enough times that none of them come as no surprise, but a few sceptics were surprised to see the **D&D® MASTERS Set** over here so early (the Assistant Editor of this worthy journal even lost a bet on the question). This is no drill — it will be on sale this summer. Those of you who were ringing the TSR offices twice a day asking when the **Companion Set** was due to arrive are forgiven for treating such firm assurances with dismissive noises.

Those others of you who remember the Companion Set as something that made everything that went before it in the D&D® game seem a bit *small*, might wonder what on earth 25th-36th level characters can get up to. Fear not — things are not as bad as they might be. If you can cope with the 1000 20th-level MUs who run Glantri, you can cope with anything in here.

New modules? Well, there's another American competition module, C5 **Llewelyn's Bane**. These aren't everyone's cup of tea, but this is better than most, by all accounts. The **Dragonlance** saga rolls on, with DL6 **Dragons of Ice** and DL7 **Dragons of Light**. Several titles in this series are topping the sales charts in the USA over 1984-5, and they have done exceptionally well over here. CM4 **Earthshaker** marks a new departure — a walking dungeon. According to the scale diagram, Earthshaker — a god-constructed robot — is to an elephant what a dog is to a flea.... now you get the chance to explore inside the machine. Also out, X9 **Savage Coast** and B9 **Castle Caldwell and Beyond**.

I must correct a tiny, but significant misprint that crept into last month's column. During typesetting, or some other moment of printing archanery, the word Umberbulk became Umberhulk. The latter is not only incorrect, but positively verboten. Fingers will roll.

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IMAGINE™ magazine interviews....

Bob Shaw

'The universe is wonderful, but only as long as there's someone there to wonder at it.'

Probably one of the finest exponents of the well-crafted science fiction novel and short story today is Bob Shaw. Books such as ***Ship of Strangers*** *and* ***Orbitsville*** *can hold their own with the best writings within the genre. In this exclusive interview, on the eve of the paperback publication of his novel* ***Orbitsville Departure****, IMAGINE magazine takes a close look at the writer and his craft. The interview took place at Andromeda Bookshop, Birmingham, in April.*

IMAGINE magazine: *When did you first become involved with science fiction? And what provided the catalyst?*

Bob Shaw: As a youngster reading the boys' comics. When I was a kid, the boys' papers weren't actually comics as we know them today. They were all print with few illustrations — **The Wizard, The Rover** and **The Hotspur**. There was always a science fiction serial running in one of them. That was my introduction to the genre. I was about seven or eight. There weren't many books; it was very difficult to get hold of science fiction novels. In the late 30s and early 40s there were very few in existence. H G Wells and Edgar Rice Burroughs were about the only ones.

I What was your first active involvement?

B I realised very early that I wanted to write, but I didn't know if I could do it. When I read a short story that had an ending which I didn't like, I'd rewrite the ending. Then I'd re-read it with my ending. It developed from there. In fact, looking back I sacrificed my education to science fiction. When I was thirteen I discovered **Astounding Science Fiction**, which is now called **Analog**. From then on I read nothing but SF until I was twenty. When I was supposed to be working for university I was doing nothing of the sort. I was producing a carbon copy SF magazine which had a readership of three!

I Who are your favourite SF writers?

B I haven't really got any. I find that I'll read a book by an author and think — this is really good, I'll read others that he's written. Usually I find they don't resemble the one I liked. In the western field, for example, you discover a writer and all his books are pretty much the same and you can have a feast. It's to the credit of science fiction writers that their output varies such a lot.

I Do you read much SF?

B I don't, in common with a lot of SF writers. When you've been writing all day and you come down in the evening you don't feel like sitting down and reading somebody else's SF. You do have to read a little, however, to see what the opposition is up to!

I Who would you put in your list of writers today who will live on? You may include yourself.

B (Chuckles) Most writers would include themselves if they were honest. You've got to have a sort of egotism, especially if you've thrown up your job, which I did, to take a chance and earn a living. I make a point of never boasting about my work, but I must have some regard for it. Brian Aldiss is one I think will live on. But it's difficult to select someone who is going to be 'immortal' and someone who won't be.

I Where does the inspiration for your work come from?

B I've always suffered from an over-active imagination. As a kid I couldn't sleep at night and I'd lie in bed going on journeys in my mind. I'd get off to sleep at three or four in the morning. This shocked my father, who was a countryman from the deep south of Ireland. He didn't even approve of me reading. An unhealthy pastime — very bad for the eyesight with a bicycle lamp under the bedclothes. Today I find an awful lot of writing can be born out of very little. It's surprising what can trigger off an idea.

I How do you set about the mechanical side of writing? Do you have a beginning, middle and ending?

B I always have all three. When I'm writing a novel I always do a detailed synopsis — mainly for commercial reasons so that publishers will give me a contract to write the book. If any reader of IMAGINE magazine wants to take up writing as a hobby or profession I can only tell him that it's a bit like being a burglar. The first thing a good burglar does is to make sure that he knows his exit. When you start staining a floor you must plan it so you finish at the door. Writing a book or story is like that. I wouldn't have the courage to start off without knowing the ending exactly and then working towards it.

I Your language always contains a glittering array of imagery. You obviously enjoy using language. Does it come naturally?

B I have to work at it. The stuff which, for a reader, reads easily, has for the writer usually been hard to write. It is for me. When I write a story I close my eyes and try to see what's happening. I then write down what I can see. Sometimes when I get to a complicated situation in a book I actually draw a picture of the scene and put the people into the setting. Next I sit down and stare at it for a while until I can actually see things happening. Then I write.

I How long does it take you to write a novel? Can you match Mike Moorcock's 'a novel in three days'?

B Mike is a phenomenon. My best ever was six weeks and that was my first book **Nightwalk**. I wrote it in my spare time whilst holding a job down. Now I'm a full-time writer it takes longer. The stories are becoming more complicated and there are more subtleties in my books today — subtleties of personal relationships and environments. On average it now takes me four or five months. I go at great speed through the action sequences, though.

I Your characters are always very strong (real people). Is it difficult creating them and how do you set about it?

B Quite often they're taken from real people I know, but I never take that person and transplant him/her into the book wholesale. I don't think I'd be right to do that. (Laughs) I might get into trouble as well. But every writer has to borrow from people he knows. I made a conscious decision when I started writing to always ensure that my characters would be as strong as those you'd get in a mainstream novel. This makes the stories more difficult to write. In a typical pulp SF novel the hero has no family relationships whatsoever. He can be whisked off to the other side of the galaxy with no trouble to him or the writer. In real life a person can have troubles with his wife and family just by getting a job fifty miles away. People realise, I think, that I'm trying to produce quality science fiction, and not just hacking the stuff out.

I Have you ever written under a pseudonym?

B No. (Laughs) It's hard enough getting one name established for me without trying others.

I Would it be true to say that hardware and technology come second to how 'the future' affects your characters when you write a new work?

B (Pause) Yes, I'd say that. I've always been interested in science and technology; I've got an engineering background. The universe is wonderful, but only as long as there's someone there to wonder at it. Without people in it the stories don't mean anything. To me people are very very important in a story.

I At one stage of your writing, glass played an important part. Why are you so fascinated by it and where did the concept of 'slowglass' come from?

B Vision and eyesight are very important. A long time ago I got an eye disease which threatened my sight and I got very scared. Glass is a very interesting subject. My hobby, when I'm not writing SF, is making stained glass lamp shades — the Tiffany glass. 'Slowglass' has been my most popular theme. The original short story has been anthologised over thirty times worldwide. The idea came from a science textbook. We all know that light travels at 186,000 miles a second but that's in a vacuum. In the book it said that it slows down passing through air and slows down a little more passing through glass. So if you see something happening through a pane of glass you're seeing it at a billionth of a second later than if you'd seen it, had not the glass been there. That was the basis of the story. As simple as that.

*I A book of yours which is very popular is **Ship of Strangers**. Can you tell IMAGINE readers about the background to the book?*

B It was dedicated to one of the writers who had influenced me the most — A E van Vogt. He did a book **The Voyage of the Space Beagle**, which is very much like mine. My book is a tribute to him. He's a bit out of fashion at the moment. In the forties, when he was at the top of his form, he was the total master. He knew what the future was going to be like. The first adult story I read was by him. I can still remember the opening line — 'The warship of imperial Earth came around the sun so quickly, that the observer had no time to commit suicide.' (Chuckles) That's what I call an opening. There's more plot there than you get in books by some modern authors today. I wanted to write a story with a lot of travel and colour. And, I wanted to set each adventure in a different world. That's how **Ship of Strangers** came about.

I Am I right in thinking that Dave Surgenor is a favourite character of yours?*

B (Pause) He could be. I'm a pretty private person. He's the sort of person I'd like to be. Quite often in my books the hero is a loner — a person with a lot of hidden strengths who can endure things I couldn't. In fact he's the sort of character I'm not. I'm pathogenically gregarious. I can't stick loneliness. When I've finished my day's writing I like to get out to the pub and have a chat with other people.

* A crew member in **Ship of Strangers**

I The gregarious side of your character is demonstrated in the number of SF conventions you attend. It's obviously very important to you – meeting the fans.

B Yes it is. I attend them very, very regularly. It's a good antidote. I love writing but it's such a lonely occupation. When I go to conventions I can talk to several hundred people. They've all read SF and I can get three months socialising crammed into one weekend. It's great.

*I **Orbitsville** is very popular. What were its origins?*

B The idea for **Orbitsville** came from the American astrophysicist Freeman Dyson. He invented the idea that when a technical civilisation really got going, it could only meet its demands for energy and living space by building a shell around its sun. I'd written two chapters when a fanzine came in with a review of a book called **Ringworld** by Larry Niven. He was hailed as a technical genius for writing that book. I said 'Hell!' and stopped writing my book. About a year later I was talking to Fred Pohl who was the then editor of Ace Books, and told him about what I'd been writing. He told me not to worry about Ringworld and that if I would write my book he would publish it. That was the best advice I ever had because it's been my most successful book, but it's doomed to lifelong comparison with Ringworld.

*I In your latest paperback **Orbitsville Departure** we meet the Ultanians. Can you tell IMAGINE readers about the background to the sequel, and about the four regions or universes?*

B People gave me a lot of credit for it because it's so outrageous, but it was a professional scientist and cosmologist who thought it out, not me. He put forward the idea that at the moment of the Big Bang as well as our universe being created, which is made up of positive matter and is going forward in time, there'd be another one made up of anti-matter and going backwards in time. He said that there would also be a tachyonic universe which is going ahead of us in time. My contribution was to invent the anti-tachyon and to say there would be a fourth universe in it — an anti-tachyon universe going into the past ahead of the Region Two universe. It seemed a good sort of background for a science fiction novel.

I Are you a religious person, bearing in mind the beliefs and philosophy of the Ultanians?

B No, not at all. Some people could perhaps build a sort of religion around their philosophy, but I'm not religious. Even though I'm a professional science fiction writer and I've got a pretty good imagination, the Bible for me is too much of a tall story.

I Is there anything about the SF genre that you don't like?

B Often the emphasis is on hardware combined with plots which are too simplistic. Space Opera in other words. It isn't real, it's pantomime in space. I hope this won't shock too many readers, but I reckon **Star Wars** didn't do SF any good. It was so successful and relied so much on special effects. It was all rockets, rayguns and robots. The success of it has convinced a lot of people that that is what SF is all about. There's a lot more to real SF than just the surface.

I How did/do you view the New Wave writing of the sixties?

B I personally didn't care for it much, but looking back I realise that it did make a contribution to the overall genre. The New Wave, I believe, has subsided and been absorbed again back into the medium but I think a lot of things it introduced, such as more adult themes, were worthwhile.

I Do you think SF changed after that small step for man, but giant leap for mankind?

B It became a shade more respectable but it didn't change much. When I was younger and you wanted to convey to someone that the idea or something was impossible, you'd just say, 'You've as much chance of doing that as you have of flying to the moon'. I was ridiculed in my teens because I read SF and believed in that crazy 'Buck Rodgers' stuff. Today a lot of people realise SF isn't/wasn't crazy. SF writers always knew there was going to be space flight long before anyone else. It's a great plus for SF.

I What direction do you see SF taking in the future?

B I wish I knew the answer to that. I'd be in the vanguard leading the way. I think it's going to keep on going pretty much the same as it has been going. But the great thing about SF is that it's not just one thing. There's something for everybody. It transcends categories. It's easy to define the Western, the Romance, the Detective or the Historical novel, but if you try to define the SF novel you find that you can't. That's why it's so difficult to predict a direction.

I Let's turn to the covers of your books and the artwork. Is there any liaison between you and the artist?

B None whatsoever. It would be nice to have some input. Some of my books have had very bad covers. You know, covers that put me off from picking up the book and looking at it. Unfortunately I haven't been asked to make suggestions; the publishing industry doesn't work that way.

I With space orientated games being very popular with the computer game player, have you been approached to work on a space game?

B I've just done one for Argus Press and it's called **Stellar Holocaust**. Basically it's about a bounty hunter of the future who gets stranded on a planet with his prisoner who he isn't going to allow to escape. They're a long way from the ship and the sun is about to blow up and engulf the planet. It's a suspense game. If you don't get through the obstacles and back to the ship before the sun explodes, you've lost. I had great fun doing it and I'm looking forward to when it comes out, which should be around Christmas.

*I **Orbitsville Departure** ended with the words 'Ultans, he thought, we'll see you around.' Will there be a third Orbitsville novel, and what project are you working on at present?*

B When I was writing the second book, I realised the story of Orbitsville still wasn't complete and I saw a big adventure for a third one which I wanted to write. Yes, there's certainly another lurking about in the back of my mind. At present I'm working on a book called **Invisible Mountains**. It's going to be the first thick book I've ever done — twice my usual length, about 400 pages. I was reading

Continued on page 54

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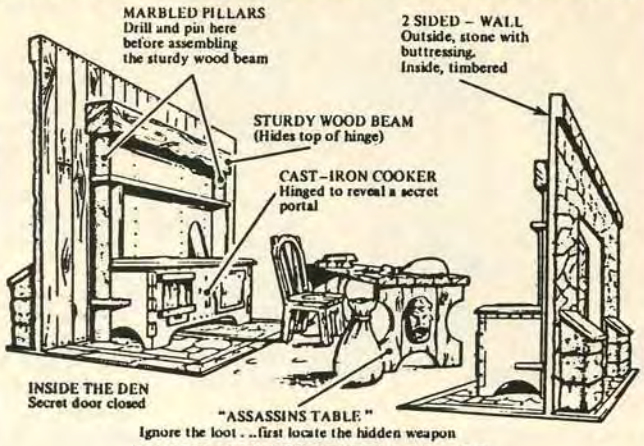
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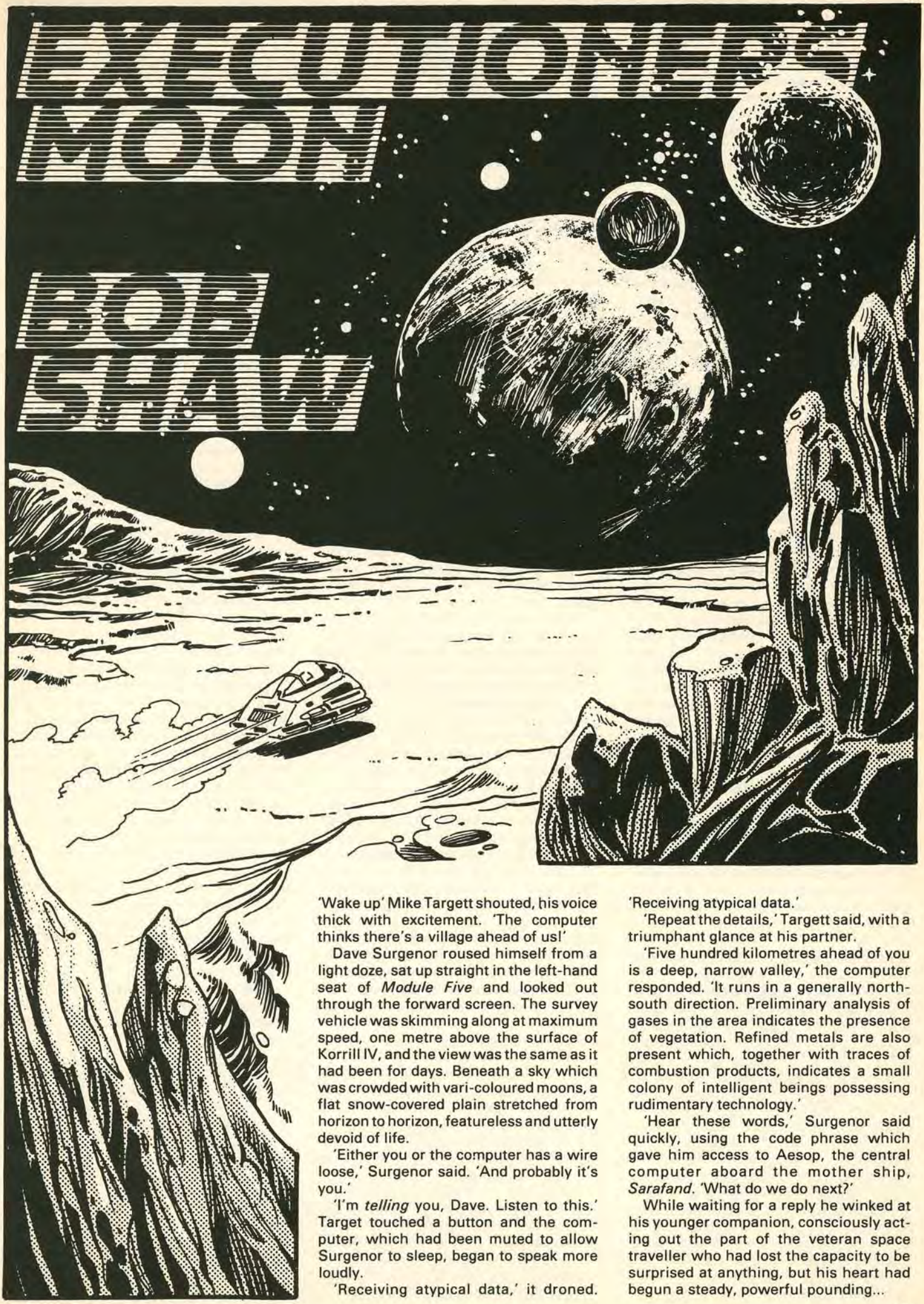
EXECUTIONER'S MOON

BOB SHAW



'Wake up' Mike Targett shouted, his voice thick with excitement. 'The computer thinks there's a village ahead of us!'

Dave Surgenor roused himself from a light doze, sat up straight in the left-hand seat of *Module Five* and looked out through the forward screen. The survey vehicle was skimming along at maximum speed, one metre above the surface of Korrill IV, and the view was the same as it had been for days. Beneath a sky which was crowded with vari-coloured moons, a flat snow-covered plain stretched from horizon to horizon, featureless and utterly devoid of life.

'Either you or the computer has a wire loose,' Surgenor said. 'And probably it's you.'

'I'm *telling* you, Dave. Listen to this.' Target touched a button and the computer, which had been muted to allow Surgenor to sleep, began to speak more loudly.

'Receiving atypical data,' it droned. 'Receiving atypical data.'

'Repeat the details,' Targett said, with a triumphant glance at his partner.

'Five hundred kilometres ahead of you is a deep, narrow valley,' the computer responded. 'It runs in a generally north-south direction. Preliminary analysis of gases in the area indicates the presence of vegetation. Refined metals are also present which, together with traces of combustion products, indicates a small colony of intelligent beings possessing rudimentary technology.'

'Hear these words,' Surgenor said quickly, using the code phrase which gave him access to Aesop, the central computer aboard the mother ship, *Sarafand*. 'What do we do next?'

While waiting for a reply he winked at his younger companion, consciously acting out the part of the veteran space traveller who had lost the capacity to be surprised at anything, but his heart had begun a steady, powerful pounding...

Korrill IV had presented special difficulties for the crew of the *Sarafand*, a Mark Six survey vessel of the Cartographical Service.

Standard operating procedure was that the mother ship would land at a planet's south pole and allow six survey modules to disembark. The mother ship, entirely under the control of its computer, then took off, did a half-circuit and landed at the north pole. Its survey modules did the same journey on the surface, equally spaced around the planet, all the while transmitting data to the ship for inclusion in the planetary resources map being constructed on the computer deck.

Surgenor noticed that Targett had unsheathed his ultralaser sidearm. 'What's the artillery for? You feeling nervous?'

In normal circumstances the ship would complete its half-circuit of the planet in about an hour, in contrast to the survey crews who had to spend days toiling across the surface. Standard procedure had not been feasible in the case of Korrill IV, however, because the planet was surrounded by a shell of forty-three major moons and approximately four hundred minor natural satellites.

The *Sarafand* had spent a long time waiting for suitable 'windows' — gaps in the ever-changing screen of satellites — to enable it to land at the south pole and get away again. And now with the survey half-completed, it was parked in a safe orbit, awaiting its chance to put down at the north pole for its rendezvous with the survey modules.

In all of Surgenor's many years with the Cartographical Service that situation had cropped up only once before, and now another equally freakish event was occurring. The Service was only assigned to map worlds which were believed to be uninhabited, and it was a very rare event indeed for the survey crews to stumble across signs of intelligent life.

'How does anybody survive in a place like this?' Surgenor said, shivering as the icy wind bit through his protective clothing. He glanced wistfully back at the beetle-shaped outline of *Module Five*, which was already obscured by swirls of dry snow.

'It'll be a lot warmer when we get down into the valley,' Targett replied. 'Aesop says the temperature could be as high as fifteen degrees.'

'Let's hope he's right.' Surgenor advanced to the rim of the cliff which ran from north to south as far as the eye could see. He looked over the edge and, in spite of his foreknowledge, caught his breath as he saw the vivid greenery which lay far below. The valley was like something out of a fairy story, a magical oasis of lush vegetation and warmth in an arctic wasteland.

'They were lucky,' Targett said. 'If the people down there are the survivors from a crashed ship, as Aesop thinks, they were dead lucky to find this place before they froze solid.'

Surgenor shook his head. 'It didn't have to be pure chance. They could have detected the valley from space and maybe used their last remnants of control to bring their ship down in this area.' Signalling for Targett to follow him, he walked along the cliff until he came to a place where the fall of the ground was less abrupt and carefully began his descent. They had been working their way down the hillside for only a few minutes when the icy conditions gave way to a region of bare rock, and then to grass and large clumps of shrubs. Soon the two men found it necessary to lower their parkas and remove their thermal jackets.

'At this rate we'll make it to the valley floor in twenty minutes or so,' Surgenor said, glancing back at Targett and noticing that the younger man had unsheathed his ultralaser sidearm. 'What's the artillery for? You feeling nervous?'

'I'm not taking any chances,' Targett said. 'I still think about that time on Horta VII when I found those killer robot torpedoes and nearly got my head shot off.'*

'This is an entirely different situation.' Surgenor shook his head in amusement. 'I should think that after being stranded on this ball of ice for a lot of years, these people will welcome us with open arms.'

'I guess you're right,' Targett said, lowering the weapon back into its holster. He had barely done so when there was a faint whizzing sound and a small dark object about the size of a wasp struck him on the neck. He gasped and clapped his hand over it and then, looking very surprised, sagged down on to the grass like a puppet whose strings had been released.

'What the ...!' Surgenor grabbed frantically for his own ultralaser as he detected a movement in nearby shrubs, but in that instant something stung his arm. He just had time to see that it was a tiny dart as all the strength departed his limbs and he collapsed on the sloping ground.

A few seconds later a group of bearded men emerged from the cover of the bushy vegetation.

There were about ten of them, wearing only loincloths and carrying blowpipes and spears. Their bodies were streaked with green and yellow pigments which had enabled them to blend perfectly with their surroundings. They advanced silently and formed a circle around the two fallen men.

'Are you all right, Mike?' Surgenor breathed, discovering that, although he was unable to move, he still had the power of speech.

'I'm just great,' Targett said bitterly. 'Welcome with open arms, you said. That's the last time I'll take your advice about any...'

'Be silent, you devil creatures!' One of the near-naked captors, a heavily muscled man with black hair, raised his spear threateningly and moved closer to Targett.

'Don't harm him, Chack,' said another of the group in a commanding voice. He was tall and coppery haired and his expression — in contrast to the hostility shown by his companions — was one of intense curiosity.

'Have you gone mad, Harld? This is exactly what King Garadan told us might happen some day.' Chack pointed accusingly at Surgenor and Targett. 'He prophesied that devils in human form might invade our valley and destroy us and all our families.'

'Two isn't much of an invasion force — and how can they destroy us while they are paralysed by the juice of the carpal plant?' The puzzlement in Harld's brown eyes deepened as he looked down at the two captives. 'These seem more like ordinary men than ...'

Chack sneered. 'The devils are *pretending* to be human to catch us off guard, just as the King warned. I say we should kill the monsters now.' There was a rumble of approval from others in the group.

'Listen to me,' Surgenor said urgently, fixing his gaze on the man called Harld. 'We *are* ordinary men, just like you. The fact that we speak the same language proves it. We came to this world in a starship — just as you or your ancestors must have done...'

'Lies!' Chack bellowed. 'There is only one language and all must speak it. Our people have always lived here, and these creatures couldn't have come from the sky, because the moons and the stars are all controlled by King Garadan. The devils are trying to confuse us — I say we have to finish them now.'

Several of the group started forward, raising their spears, but they drew back when Harld leaped into the centre of the circle. 'I am the leader of this hunting party. I will decide what must be done.'

'We await your decision, great leader,' a third man said sarcastically.

'I...' Harld gazed uncertainly at Surgenor and Targett. 'Bind their hands. We will take them to the King.'

Two of the group immediately took cords from their waist pouches, knelt down and tied the captives' wrists together behind their backs. Surgenor was relieved to find that the paralysing weakness was beginning to leave his limbs, but there was little comfort in the discovery. It appeared that the little colony of shipwreck survivors on Korrill IV

* *Ship of Strangers, Gollancz 1978.*

had been there long enough, perhaps well over a hundred years, to have forgotten all about their origins and to have degenerated into barbarism. And he did not look forward to meeting Garadan, their so-called king, who seemed to rule through superstition, fear and cruelty.

Several of the men raised Surgenor and Targett to their feet, laughing at the way in which they staggered and swayed on drug-weakened legs, then the entire group moved off down the slope. It was already growing dusk in the narrow valley and the racing vari-coloured moons visibly changed position overhead, but Surgenor could not appreciate the eerie beauty of the scene. The green valley, which had looked so enticing at first sight, was now filled with menace, the promise of death.

'There's one good thing,' Targett whispered as he stumbled along at Surgenor's side. 'They didn't take our ultralasers — they mustn't have recognised them as weapons.'

'I doubt if that's going to make much difference,' Surgenor replied. 'The characters who tied us up knew what they were doing. My hands are numb already.'

'Does that mean we've nothing going for us at all?'

'I wouldn't say that. I took the precaution of wearing a communicorder — so Aesop can see and hear everything that's happening to us.'

'Are you sure it's working?' Targett glanced doubtfully at the button-like device on Surgenor's lapel. 'Aesop hasn't said anything.'

'That's because he isn't stupid,' Surgenor said. 'How long would we last in this company with a ghost voice? You can take it that Aesop knows what's going on.'

'I don't see what difference that makes,' Targett replied gloomily. 'He can't bring the ship down here because of all those damned moons and he can't use heavy weaponry from orbit without vaporising us as well.'

'We'll have to trust Aesop to come up with something — that's his job.'

Surgenor tried to sound optimistic, concealing his unease at having to trust his life to the resourcefulness of a distant and artificial intelligence. It was a situation which had occurred more than once during his years in the Cartographical Service, but he was never going to get used to it.

'Aesop? Who is this Aesop you speak of?' The voice was that of Harld, who had moved closer to Surgenor as they negotiated a bend in the tricky downwards path.

Surgenor decided against trying to explain that Aesop was an intelligent machine. 'He is the captain of our starship.'

Harld glanced around, making sure he was not overheard. 'Just before he died my father told me a strange story. He said people had come to this valley in a ship which fell from the sky. He warned me not to repeat the story, because the King would be angry. I thought nothing more of it until I heard you talk of similar things, then I began to wonder...'

'We told you the truth,' Surgenor whispered. 'We're not devils. We are men and we can help your people. We can bring you food and clothing and medicine. You must let us return to our ship.'

Harld shook his head. 'I dare not go against King Garadan. He is all-seeing and allpowerful.'

'He is only a man. We can protect you from him.'

'Nobody can do that,' Harld said. 'Why, the very moons in the sky do as he bids them.'

'What do you mean?'

Harld glanced up at the narrowing strip of sky. 'If the King commands a green moon to cross above us, it will do so. His power and his magic extend to the heavens. I dare not challenge him lest he summons the Blood Moon.' As though fearful of having said too much, Harld moved away and rejoined the other hunters.

'What do you make of all that?' Surgenor said to Targett.

'There was the same kind of set-up in some primitive societies back on Earth,' Targett replied. 'Priests who learned some astronomy were able to terrorise ordinary folk by appearing to order eclipses to happen.'

'So this King Garadan knows the planet's moon system pretty well. What's so impressive about that? Other people must have noticed recurring cycles and patterns of ...'

'That's just it, Dave,' Targett said grimly. 'There aren't any regular cycles. This planet has so many moons, all jostling and tugging at each other — especially the forty-three major ones — that the pattern never repeats. If this King Garadan can predict astronomical events on this planet, he must be a genius. I don't like the sound of him, Dave — and I'll tell you something I like even less.'

'What's that?'

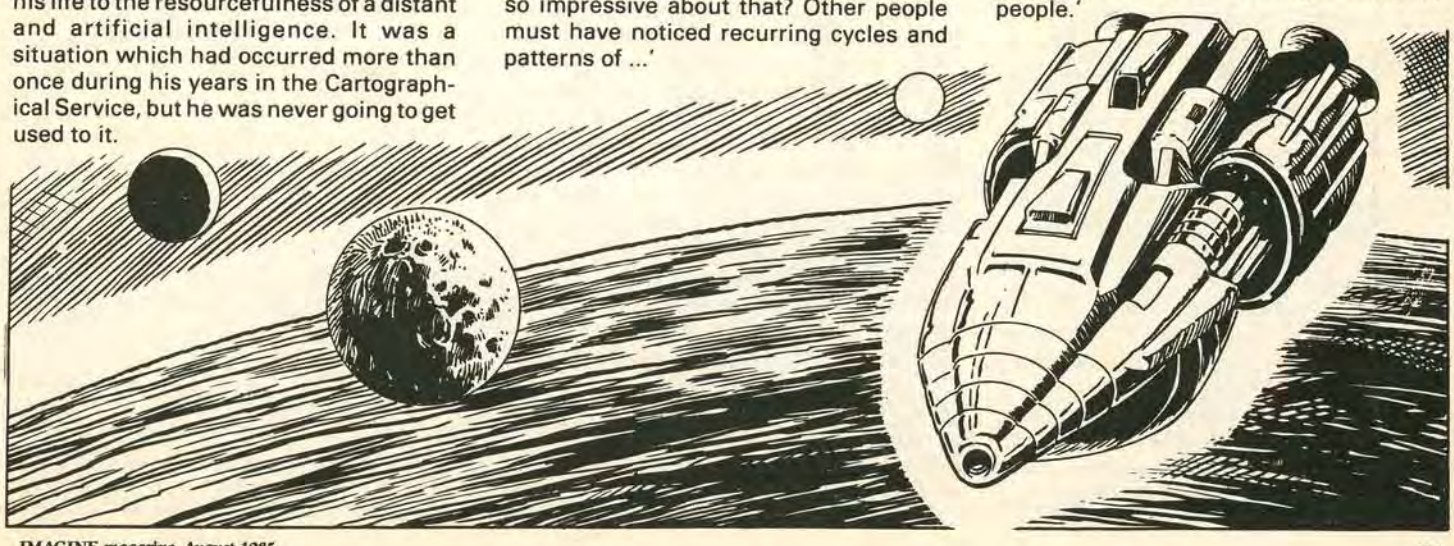
'On the way into this system we observed that one of the largest moons had a lot of iron oxides on the surface, giving it a deep red colour. That must be the one they call the Blood Moon — and I've got a funny feeling they weren't just being poetical when they chose that name.'

The village consisted of perhaps fifty small huts made of mud and straw. The mean dwellings were arranged in a double line along the narrow floor of the valley and men, women and children — most of them looking undernourished — had gathered to watch the arrival of the two captive devils. As Surgenor and Targett were herded by, the people clustered behind and followed them. In a very short time they reached a much larger building which, in spite of the increasing darkness, glowed with the lustre of polished metal.

'It's built out of hull plates from a spaceship,' Targett whispered. 'That must be where Garadan lives.'

'And he's coming out to welcome us in person,' Surgenor replied, his eyes intent on the figure of a middle-aged man who was emerging from the metal building. King Garadan was, in contrast to his subjects, dressed in a richly textured robe. He carried a small carved box which seemed to be inlaid with gold and gems. His body looked plump and soft, but there was nothing soft about his eyes. He regarded Surgenor and Targett with cold hostility for a few seconds, then turned to Harld.

'Why did you bring the devils here?' he demanded. 'My orders have always been clear. You should have killed them before they had any chance to bring harm to my people.'



Harld took a deep breath. 'Sire, they seem more like men than devils.'

'That is part of their devilish trickery.'

'But if they are so powerful and dangerous, why do they need to employ trickery? And why was it so easy for us to capture them if...?'

'Silence!' Garadan's face was pale with anger. 'Do you question my divine authority?'

'No, Sire.' Harld glanced at the watchful circle of villagers. 'But our food grows scarce and some of our children will die in the coming winter. The strangers said they could give us food and clothing. I thought it would be better if...'

'You presumed to know better than your King!' Garadan stared coldly at the villagers, some of whom had begun to whisper among themselves on hearing Harld speak of food and clothing. They shuffled their feet uneasily and lowered their heads.

'Don't be alarmed,' Garadan said to them. 'The gods grow angry, but not at you. It is Harld who has earned their wrath by bringing the devils here and sowing doubt in your minds.' Garadan glanced down at his ornately carved box. 'As a portent of their anger — and of my divine authority — they are sending four white moons. The light from the moons will turn night in the valley into day, to remind you that the gods can see into your innermost thoughts and will punish the unfaithful. The moons will appear...' Garadan again glanced into the box he carried. '... *now*!'

Garadan pointed upwards at the eastern rim of the valley and there was a gasp from the assembly as the brilliant white disk of a large moon appeared, closely followed by three others. For a minute the valley was brightly illuminated by the four speeding satellites, then they had crossed the visible strip of sky and near-darkness returned. There was a hushed silence.

'The King is all-powerful,' a woman cried in a thin, wailing voice. 'We must obey him and kill the devils.'

'That is your only way to appease the gods,' Garadan shouted in a voice which was hoarse with triumph. 'Prepare the devils for execution. I have commanded the Blood Moon to appear in a short time — and the devils must die as soon as its light falls on the altar.'

The altar was a flat circular stone close to the entrance of Garadan's metal palace. It was ringed by flickering torches whose light gleamed irregularly on the massive two-edged sword which waited on a gilded trestle. Surgenor and Targett, bound hand and foot, had been laid down beside each other in the centre of the rock. The entire population of the village was gathered around the altar, watching and waiting.

'At least we now know how Garadan does it,' Surgenor said to his younger companion. 'One of his ancestors must have salvaged a small computer from the wreck of their ship and his family has

been using it ever since to overawe all the others with their so-called divine powers. It's a neat set-up Garadan has here — living in luxury with hundreds of abject slaves.'

'I thought Harld was beginning to get through to them when he mentioned food and clothing,' Targett said. 'But you have to hand it to Garadan — he made good use of those four white moons coming along when they did.'

'It's what he's going to do when the red moon appears that bothers me.' Surgenor made another futile attempt to loosen his bonds. 'How long do you think we've got?'

'Who knows? Maybe a couple of hours.'

A dark coldness gathered inside Surgenor as he considered the idea that all of Earth's vaunted technology was powerless to save them from death at the hands of a pitiful group of primitives. 'Hear these words, Aesop,' he said bitterly, addressing himself via his communicorder button to the computer on board his ship. 'Where are you? What are you doing up there?'

'There's nothing Aesop *can* do,' Targett said, with a gloomy fatalism. 'It may be days before he can get the *Sarafand* down through that screen of satellites and by that time it will be all over.'

'He must have told the other modules to change course and get here.'

'Yes, but that won't make any difference either. Even the nearest modules couldn't possibly reach us until...'

Targett's words were lost in a sudden hubbub of excitement from the crowd.

Surgenor turned his head and saw that the robed figure of Garadan had appeared at the entrance of his palace. Still carrying his carved and bejewelled box, Garadan walked slowly towards the altar and the villagers parted to make way for him. In the flickering light of the torches his face was immobile and inhuman as he reached the edge of the flat rock and stepped up on to it. He raised one hand imperiously and an expectant silence descended over the crowd.

'The Blood Moon answers my command,' Garadan proclaimed in ringing tones. 'Soon it will appear above you — to oversee and sanctify the execution of the devil creatures.'

'You won't get away with this, Garadan,' Surgenor said fiercely, struggling with his bonds. 'We're not alone on this world. Our friends are on the way to us right now... with powerful weapons...'

'The devils are trying even more of their lies and trickery,' Garadan said, glancing down into his box. 'But nothing can save them because...' He raised his right hand and pointed upwards at the eastern edge of the strip of sky. 'I command the Blood Moon to appear... NOW!'

A dreadful fascination drew Surgenor's gaze to the rim of the valley. His heart began a frenzied pounding as he waited for the emergence of the first sliver of crimson brightness which would herald the end of his life. And in the midst of all his fears and regrets was one persistent, pounding question: *Why had Aesop not even tried to help them?*

The silence overhanging the strange scene was absolute. Every eye was fixed on the designated portion of sky.

Surgenor had endured the suspense for perhaps twenty seconds, perhaps thirty — time had ceased to have any meaning for him — when he began to realise that Garadan's computer had been slightly out in its prediction. The red satellite was taking longer to show up than expected. The watching villagers must have thought the delay unusual because they began to stir a little.

Garadan put his hand into the carved box, obviously interrogating the computer inside. 'The Blood Moon will appear,' he shouted, but now there was an edge of panic in his voice. 'I, King Garadan, have ordered it so.'

More drawn-out seconds dragged by as the sky remained dark, and there was an increasingly restless murmuring from the crowd. Surgenor began to feel a flickering of hope. Something had definitely gone wrong with the computer prediction and therein lay his and Targett's chance of salvation.

'The Blood Moon refuses to appear,' he called out. 'The gods have turned against Garadan! It is a sign they want us set free.'

'Be silent!' Garadan snarled. 'All of you, be silent! I am your king and I command you to...'

'He's just an ordinary man,' Surgenor cut in, raising his voice against the growing clamour among the watchers. 'One who has been tricking you into serving him while your children go cold and hungry. Don't be fooled any longer. This is your chance to...'

Surgenor's voice faded as Garadan, with a growl of hatred, dropped his box and ran to the trestle which supported the ceremonial sword. Garadan snatched up the weapon, turned to Surgenor and raised the gleaming blade above his head. The blade had begun its downward sweep when there was a sudden movement near the edge of the altar. A hunting spear swished through the air and hit Garadan full on the chest. He fell backwards, twitched spasmodically, and then was still.

Surgenor recognised Harld's coppery hair as the hunter leaped up on to the flat rock and held up his hands to quieten the circle of villagers.

'Listen to me,' Harld called out. 'I have slain Garadan and the gods did nothing to save him, which proves he was just an ordinary man — exactly as the strangers said. I believe that they, too, are ordinary men — not devils — and I also believe they can do much good for all of us. Let us at least hear what they have to say. And if, when they have done, you are not satisfied that they spoke the truth — then you can put them, and me, to the sword.'

During the silence that followed, Surgenor became aware of Mike Targett squirming closer to him. 'You always liked to hear yourself talk, big man,' Targett said, his voice quavering with relief. 'Now's your chance — the stage is all yours.'

Early on the following morning, having said a temporary goodbye to the villagers, Surgenor and Targett began the long climb to the rim of the valley. They wanted to wait in their own vehicle for the arrival of the other survey modules, and for the eventual landing of the Sarafand. That would be the first step in the long job of rehabilitating and educating the lost colony of humans, and ultimately of returning them to Earth.

'That was the luckiest escape we're ever likely to have,' Targett said. 'Do you realise that if Garadan's computer hadn't gone wrong just when it did, we would be dead men?'

'I don't need to be reminded of that fact,' Surgenor replied soberly. 'And a fat lot of good Aesop was to us! When I get back to the ship I might take a hammer and put a few dents in his memory banks.'

'I advise you not to damage official property, David.' The voice issuing from Surgenor's communicorder button was unmistakably that of Aesop.

'So you're still functioning, Aesop,' Surgenor said. 'I was beginning to think you had developed a short circuit.'

'My circuits are immune to that kind of malfunction,' Aesop said pedantically. 'I could not communicate with you while you were within earshot of the people in the village. As you surmised, it would have been too disturbing for them.'

Surgenor snorted to show his displeasure. 'We got a bit disturbed ourselves, you know. If Garadan's computer hadn't fouled up...'

'His computer was working perfectly,' Aesop cut in. 'It is a TCM 84C — a type which was widely used in colonisation ships in the last century and which is noted for great reliability. I might also add that Garadan had programmed it extremely well — he must have had a natural talent in that respect.'

'But...' Surgenor struggled to comprehend what he was hearing. 'What went wrong with his prediction about the red moon?'

'It was a simple lack of input data,' Aesop said, emotionless as ever. 'Garadan had no way of knowing that I had decided to discredit him in the eyes of his followers in order to preserve your life and that of Michael.'

'Discredit him? How?'

'By intercepting the red moon while it was still at a distant point in its orbit and detonating my entire arsenal of anti-meteor weapons on its northern hemisphere.' Aesop continued speaking in matter-of-fact tones, as though discussing a minor adjustment to a coffee machine. 'The deviation in the moon's path was slight, of course, but it was cumulative and sufficient to prevent it being seen from the bottom of the valley.'

'Holy...!' Targett halted, his jaw sagging with surprise.

'So what you're telling us,' Surgenor went on, 'is that you calmly knocked the moon out of its orbit!'

Shocked by the magnitude of the concept, Surgenor was once again reminded of the gulf which existed between his own human mentality and that of Aesop. To a human being there was something blasphemous in changing the appearance of the very heavens to suit the needs of presumptuous men — but Aesop worked as a pure intellect, unhampered by any emotion. To Aesop a problem was simply an exercise in logic; nothing more, nothing less.

'The direct approach to a problem is often the most effective,' Aesop said. 'Don't you agree, David?'

'Oh, absolutely,' Surgenor replied airily, striving to regain his composure. There had been a dry quality to Aesop's voice, one he had noticed on previous occasions and which had led him to wonder if Aesop could be poking fun at him. Was it possible for a computer to have a sense of humour?

Surgenor considered the notion for a moment, then he shook his head and continued climbing towards the snowfields which gleamed in the sunshine far above.

Bob Shaw

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The Sarafand File

Paul Vernon & Sean Masterson

Source Files

Central Records, Cartographical Service
Ship of Strangers, Bob Shaw

All the sections of this **TRAVELLER** and **STAR FRONTIERS®** game adventure file, except the **Mission Profiles**, may be given to players at the start of play in addition to any normal referee's briefing. The information in these sections is readily available to the player characters. **IMAGINE™** magazine grants permission for referees to photocopy the relevant sections for their personal use only.

THE CARTOGRAPHICAL SERVICE

Beyond the volume of explored and colonised space — the Bubble — preliminary surveys by unmanned probes are continuously carried out. The diplomatic and military arms of government are given responsibility for those systems and worlds which apparently support intelligent life. The vast majority of systems have no planets within their star's ecosphere or have not yet evolved intelligent life. Mapping these systems for later exploitation is the purpose of the Cartographical Service.

To perform this task, the Cartographical Service utilises specially designed exploration vessels, of which the **Sarafand** is a typical example. Although the ships have a crew of 12 to 15 members, command of the ship and the survey missions are the responsibility of ***AESOP***. The Sarafand's crews have always thought ***AESOP*** to be Advanced Electronic Spaceship Operator and Pilot. Crew duties are confined to piloting individual Survey Modules — not-so-small go-anywhere exploration vehicles — as it has been found practical to have a human element within the system to cope with the unexpected.

The Cartographical Service and RPGs

Survey vessels such as the **Sarafand** make an ideal base for adventurers. The crew roster is small enough for player characters to be influential, while even smaller groups can adventure as the crews of Survey Modules. However, a few modifications do need to be made to Bob Shaw's technological background to suit the needs of role-playing games, and the technological backgrounds of the game systems.

AESOP, the ship's computer and master, is by far the most influential character in the *Ship of Strangers* stories. Although this makes the book interesting, as a part of the game it is likely to be very unsuccessful, as player interest is almost certain to be diminished by being ordered about by a computer. The responsibility for decision-making has to be returned to the players, and this entails giving ***AESOP*** an advisory, rather than controlling, role in the **Sarafand's** command structure. In *Ship of Strangers* there are only 12 crew members plus ***AESOP*** as mission commander. In this file there are 15 members, the extra humans being command staff.

A final problem with the missions undertaken by a Sarafand class explorer is that many of them are boringly routine, which does not aid in making the game exciting. One way to avoid this is to run the player characters' very first survey as a dull, routine affair to 'show them the ropes' and then use the out-of-the-ordinary mission profiles, stressing how many dull surveys there have been between moments of interest and excitement. There might be 10-60 dull missions between specially profiled occurrences.

TRAVELLER

The Scout Service of the Imperium (see **Scouts**, Book 6) includes, among its offices and branches, the External and Internal Mapping Branches of the Imperial Grand Survey. These two parts of the Grand Survey have roughly the same responsibilities as the Cartographical Service of *Ship of Strangers*. Simply renaming the Cartographical Survey as the Imperial Grand Survey (or vice versa) is all that is required.

The Imperium of the official **GDW Traveller** universe leaves scouts with very little mapping to do, as the Imperium is a mature state which has expanded to fill much of the available surrounding real estate. If the suggestions in **Uncharted Stars** (see **IMAGINE** magazine, #19) are followed, they will provide numerous locations for potential adventures for members of the Cartographical Service.

The STAR FRONTIERS game

The **Knight Hawks Campaign Book** includes an option for characters to become officers in the UPF Spacefleet (p48-50), but this may not be entirely suitable for many campaigns. The Cartographical Service gives referees a chance to provide a consistent backdrop for adventures together with a chance for player characters to see a bit more of the universe than is normally possible.

The Cartographical Service of the UPF is an entirely independent arm of government (although it was once part of Star Law), with its own command structure, bases, ships, training academy, budget and operational commitments. It exists solely to survey planetary systems, collate such information from the corporations and maintain and issue maps, star catalogues and geological data.

Safax Institute

The headquarters of the Cartographical Service is at Triad in Cassadine, part of the main UPF facilities in that system. It is here, at the Safax Training Institute on Triad's moon, that the future crews of exploration vessels are given their initial training.

Applicants for the Cartographical Service are 'stable, well adjusted and intelligent' but do not require any relevant skills. INT/LOG and PER/LDR must be above 45, and non-human applicants have a 75% chance of being rejected regardless of their qualifications (single species ships make long periods of confinement while on survey missions easier to bear).

Training in the use of the Survey Modules (the equivalent of Technician 4 subskill Operate Machinery) is provided by the Cartographical Service. Computer 2, Technician 2, Medical 2 or Environmental 2 and a level 1 Military PSA skill are also taught to the character at Safax. This training procedure supercedes the normal starting skill allowance if the entrant characters are newly created.

Advancement

After training at Safax, characters are expected to serve at least two years aboard one of the Cartographical Service's exploration vessels (obviously, administrators and support personnel are required, but these are non-adventuring posts filled by NPCs). The two year minimum requirement is mandatory; hospital time, for example, is not counted towards service time or paid as such (although the Cartographical Service does pay for treatment).

In-service training is considered worthwhile, and is often one of the few ways to pass the time during missions. Characters may continue to spend experience points and acquire new skills through hypno-training, practice or training while on missions. Length of service and skills both contribute towards character advancement within the pay structure of the Cartographical Service. Leadership of teams usually falls upon the shoulders of the most experienced crew members or the natural leaders of the group. As long as the job gets done, the Cartographical Service does not mind how individual ships are organised.

Qualifications	Daily Pay
Up to 2 years	100
Up to 6 years or at least 40 experience points worth of skills	300
Up to 12 years or at least 80 experience points worth of skills	500
More than 12 years or at least 150 experience points worth of skills	650

The Service provides no retirement benefits for employees.

CREW

The ship's crew of a typical Sarafand class vessel is usually a mixed bag, with only one or two long term members. The rest are short assignment, limited contract personnel.

Most crew members serve for two two-year periods before leaving to pursue projects of their own with the money that they have earned. There are, however, one or two veteran crew members aboard most ships, providing a valuable steadying influence. The Cartographical Service is seen more as a stepping stone to other things than as a profession — though the work itself is monotonous and unsocial, the pay is excellent (at least double the rates paid by commercial corporations for people with the same skills), even though the opportunities for spending it are somewhat limited.

When surveying a planet, the team leader, computer operator and one other crew member stay aboard the Sarafand in order to monitor data as it is received from the Survey Modules. The remaining 12 crew members provide crews for the Survey Modules.

TRAVELLER

1. Pilot/Team Leader, UPP 5A78C9, Terms 5, Pilot-4, Leader-2, Nav-2, J-o-T-1, Veh*-1, Gun Cbt-1.
2. Navigator, UPP 4867C6, Terms 5, Pilot-1, Nav-3, Elec-2, Comp-1, Gun Cbt-1.
3. Medic, UPP 3877B5, Terms 5, Medic-3, Vacc-2, Gun Cbt-2, J-o-T-1, Veh*-1.
4. Computer Operator, UPP 685988, Terms 4, Comp-4, J-o-T-2, Gun Cbt-1, Pilot-1.
5. Leading Engineer, UPP 9A8967, Terms 4, Engrg-3, J-o-T-2, Gun Cbt-2, Veh*-1.
6. Engineer, UPP C79778, Terms 3, Engrg-2, Gun Cbt-1, Elec-1, Mech-1, Veh*-1.
7. Engineer, UPP AB9C98, Terms 3, Engrg-2, Pilot-1, Veh*-1, Mech-1.
8. Engineer UPP 687DB7 Terms 5 Pilot-1, Gun Cbt-2, Medic-1, Mech-3, Veh*-2, J-o-T-2.
9. Engineer UPP 788A96 Terms 2 Engrg-1, Veh*-1, Gun Cbt-1, Elec-1.
10. Engineer UPP 9838B5 Terms 2 Engrg-1, Veh*-1, Mech-1, Gun Cbt-2.
11. Leading Gunner UPP 79DA77 Terms 5 Gunnery-4, Gun Cbt-2, Veh*-1, Comp-1, Elec-1.
12. Gunner UPP 59385A Terms 2 Gunnery-1, Veh*-1, J-o-T-1, Gun Cbt-1.
13. Gunner UPP A97468 Terms 4 Gunnery-3, Vacc-2, Mech-1, Veh*-1.
14. Gunner UPP 5A9767 Terms 3 Gunnery-2, J-o-T-1, Veh*-1, Elec-1, Gun Cbt-1.
15. Gunner UPP CA8569 Terms 2 Veh*-2, Gunnery-1, Vacc-1, Gun Cbt-1.

* Vehicle skills (Veh) pertain to driving the Sarafand Survey Modules.

The STAR FRONTIERS game

The crewing policy of the Cartographical Service in the **STAR FRONTIERS** game reflects the fact that *Ship of Strangers* is set in a human universe. Mixed species crew are not usually employed aboard Sarafand class vessels, and few non-humans ever bother to apply for this type of repetitive and boring work, even though it is highly paid.

The 15 crew members, other than the two or three 'oldtimers' aboard most ships, are only expected to have enough skills to operate the vessel under normal conditions, while relying on ***AESOP's*** self programming ability for major problems. Typically, Computer 2, Technician 2, Medical 2 or Environmental 2 and some military PSA skills are required by short term crew members. Training in the use of Survey Modules (the equivalent Technician 4 subskill Operate Machinery) is provided by the Cartographical Service. Characters can then fully operate the Survey Modules in normal circumstances. Success rolls (at the referee's discretion) may be needed under exceptional conditions.

Long term crew members usually have spaceship skills and appropriate foundation skills as well. The 'captain' of a Sarafand class vessel usually has minimum skills of Technician 6, Computer 6, Piloting 4, Astrogation 2 (or System Navigation 3) and Weapon 3, while the other 'oldtimers' are similarly skilful in their areas of competence, including the new Astronomy skill detailed below. One of the long term crew members will usually be designated as the ship's weaponry officer in addition to any other duties, and will have Gunnery (Energy Weapons) 3, although this character need not have the relevant Beam Weapons 6 skill (this is an exception to the normal foundation skills requirement for this NPC only).

The description of the Cartographical Service at the beginning of this file outlines its use as an alternative career to the UPF SpaceFleet (see **Knight Hawks Campaign Book**).

New Skills for STAR FRONTIERS characters

	Cost					
Level:	1	2	3	4	5	6
System Navigation	6	12	20	30	50	75
Astronomy	As other Technological skills					

ASTRONOMY (Technological)

The study of stars, galaxies, planets, moons, asteroids, comets and meteors, their conditions and origins.

This skill has two sub-skills: Identify and Calculate. Astronomers must make observations to perform either subskill, using telescopes, radar, energy sensors, cameras and computers. Each type of equipment astronomers use to make their observations adds 10% to their chance of success.

Identify
Success Rate: 10 x skill level + equipment
Astronomers can identify objects in space, from planets to spaceships. Identifying takes half an hour for objects closer than 10,000 kilometres. Objects further away take 1 hour to identify.

Calculate
Success Rate: 10 x skill level + equipment
Astronomers can calculate the age, speed, mass or orbit (course) of any object in space. Astronomers can only make one calculation at a ti
Each calculation takes half an hour.

SYSTEM NAVIGATION (Spaceship)

This skill is used to guide a ship (usually one incapable of interstellar travel) within a star system. As such, it is a partial replacement for the Astrogation skill given in the **Knight Hawks Campaign Book**. System Navigation requires foundation skill of Computer 2.

Plot Course
Success Rate: 40% + 10% x skill level — 10% per hour less than required plotting time
Navigators make the complicated calculations required to plot a safe and accurate course for a spaceship. The time needed for course calculations increases for longer trips, because even small errors become very serious as the distance increases. The required plotting time is one hour per 100,000 kilometres that will be travelled. Navigators can cut the required plotting time in half by using computers to aid them (typically with Analysis programs).

If the navigator spends less than the required plotting time, his success rate is reduced. Every hour of the required plotting time the navigator does not spend reduces his success rate by 10%.

If a navigator fails the plot course roll, an error has been made, and all the calculations must be made again.

MISSION PROFILES

Cartographical survey missions are supposed to follow the same, invariable pattern. On arrival in a target system, the plane of the elliptic is determined and the first planet for scanning is chosen. The exploration ship orbits the planet, deploying three communications satellites into geo-synchronous orbits above the equator, and then lands at one of the poles. The Survey Modules are launched, and they fly (or drive) over preset courses which are plotted to allow the entire surface of the planet to be scanned by the Module sensors. Data is transmitted to the ship via the satellites.

Meanwhile, the ship takes off and lands at the opposite pole to await the arrival of the Survey Modules. Once all the modules have been recovered, the ship then leaves for the next target world. Work for the Cartographical Service is, for the most part, very boring....

The following scenario outlines are given in **TRAVELLER**-style **76 Patrons** format, which will be unfamiliar to **STAR FRONTIERS** referees. An outline of the situation is presented, but the specific details are left largely to the referee to determine, based on the experience and temperament of the players involved. If the scenarios are used as a basis for a campaign, Mission Profiles 1 & 2 should be run consecutively, for reasons that will become apparent.

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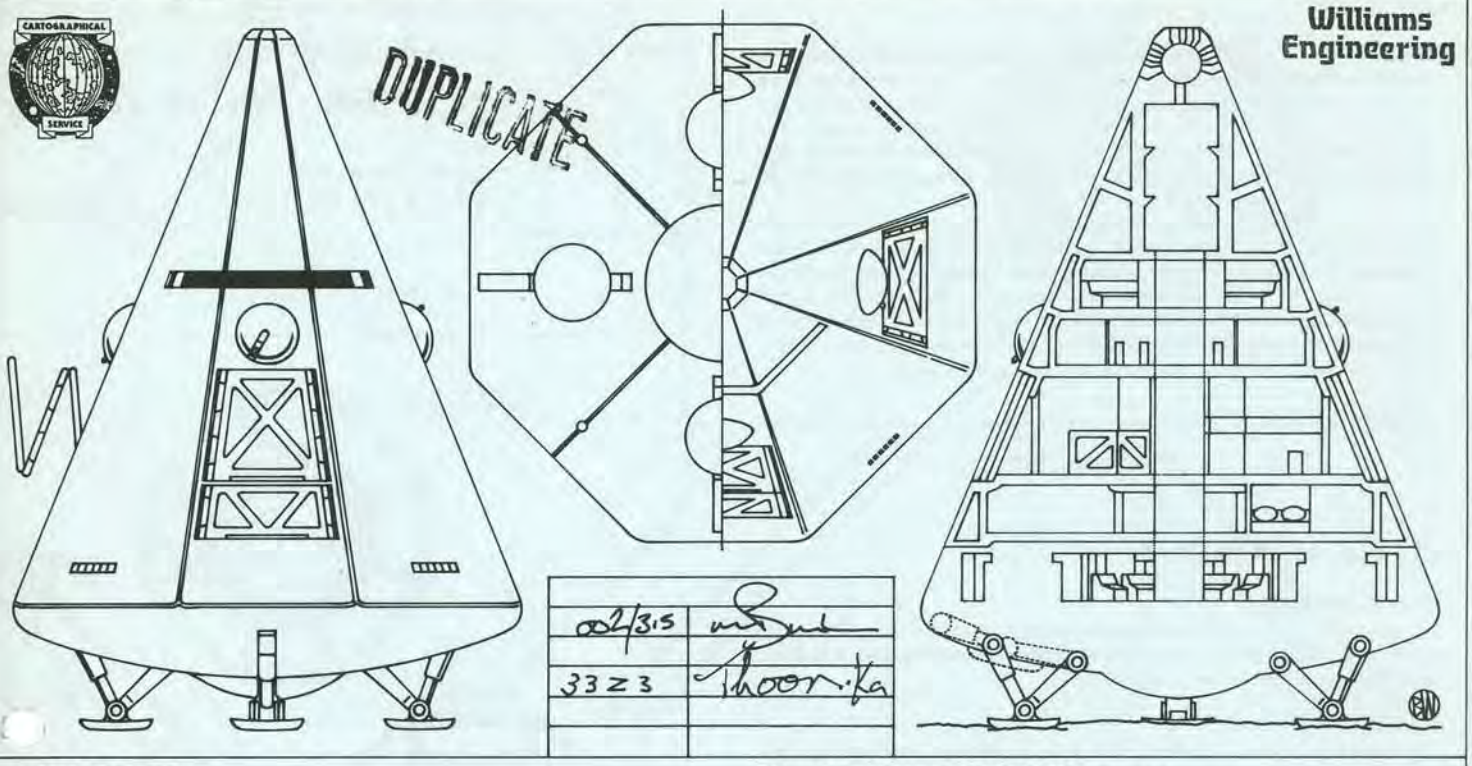
SARAFAND (Cartographical Service Mark 6 Exploration Ship)



TRAVELLER

The Sarafand class is built on an 800 ton hull and used to carry a survey team and their survey modules to previously unmapped planetary systems. Its jump drive-4, manouevre drive-4 and power plant-4, give jump-4 and 4-g acceleration (Book 5, 2nd Edition design), and the fuel tankage of 352 tons supports 4 weeks of power plant operation and one jump-4. An onboard purification plant is carried. The hull is streamlined to allow wilderness refuelling and planetary landings.

The computer system, installed adjacent to the bridge, is a model/7 fib. Eight turrets are installed at launch, four carrying a pair of fusion guns each and four with two missile racks and a sandcaster each.

On a large hangar deck, the ship carries six survey modules for planetary scanning, each displacing 10 tons. The cargo capacity of 78 tons is used to carry the supplies and comprehensive range of spares required for deep-space operations away from maintenance facilities.

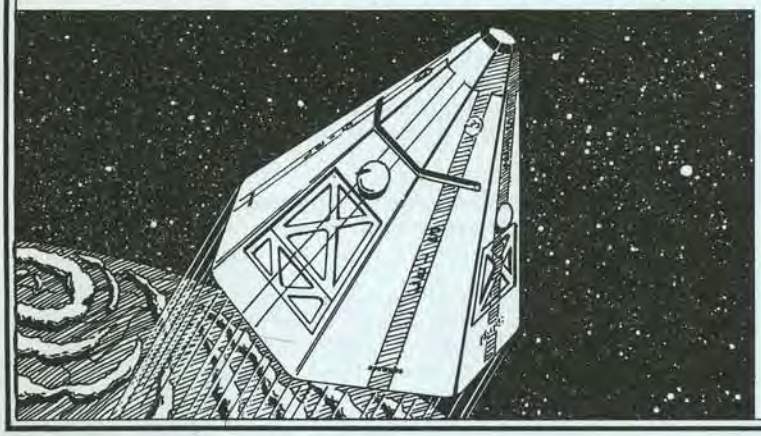
The crew of fifteen (pilot/team leader, navigator, medic, computer operator, six engineers and five gunners) have their own staterooms. All except the pilot and computer operator act as survey module crews in addition to their ship-board duties.

The Mark 6 Exploration ship takes 25 months to build and costs 660.156MCr (fully equipped); 20 months and 528.124MCr if constructed in bulk.

High Guard Statistics (2nd Edition)

SJ-374 **SARAFAND**

SJ-81444G2-030000-05003-0			MCr 660.156		800 tons
Batty Bearing	4	2 2	Crew = 15		TL = 13
Passengers = 0	Low = 0	Cargo = 78	Fuel = 352	EP = 32	Agility = 1



The STAR FRONTIERS game

SHIP'S NAME: Sarafand (class)
OWNER: UPF Cartographical Service
CAPTAIN ABOARD: Team Leader (with ***AESOP***)

HULL SIZE: 3
ENGINES: 2 x A Atomics — De-rated UPF Triad Shipyards Type 42's
FUEL: 3 pellets/engine
COST: Cr 1,502,300
CREW: 15
CREW SALARIES: Variable

LIFE SUPPORT CAPACITY
- MAIN: 18
- BACKUP: 0

PASSENGER ACCOMMODATION:
- FIRST: 1
- JOURNEY: 14
- STORAGE: 0

COMMUNICATION EQUIPMENT: Videocom, intercom, subspace radio

OTHER EQUIPMENT: Radar, full camera system, energy sensors, skin sensors, 6 x survey module

ADF: 3
MR: 4
DCR: 29
HULL POINTS: 15
WEAPONS: 2 x Laser battery
DEFENCES: Reflective hull

The Mark 6 Exploration ship does not quite fall within the standard rules of ship design for the **STAR FRONTIERS** game.

The Sarafand class carries an extra laser battery without penalty because it is built to military, rather than civilian, specifications.

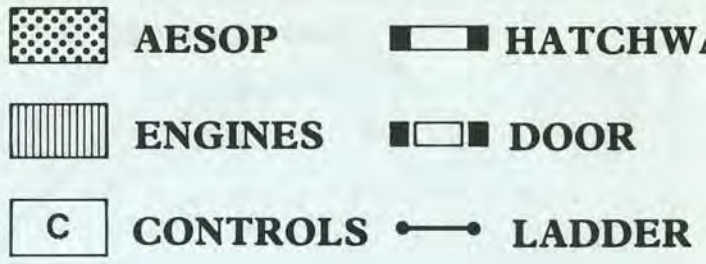
The deck plans also show that a great deal of internal space is devoted to special compartments for fuel storage. This is because starships carry a great deal of fuel within the hull in the TRAVELLER game. Furthermore, the engines are built directly into the hull but they are heavily shielded and can be jettisoned in an emergency. The crew is not exposed to an increased level of radiation.

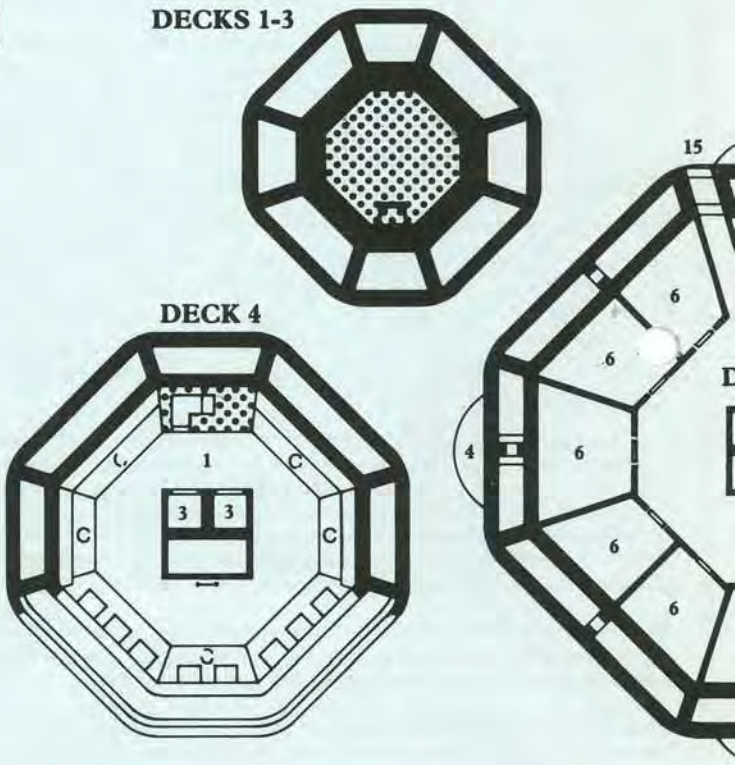
Referees may also notice that the Survey Modules carry out many of the functions performed by landing drones (**Knight Hawks Campaign Book** p22). Union pressures have forced the Cartographical Service to maintain its fleet of Mark 6 Exploration Ships, although the Marks 7 & 8 do exist (and are equipped with advanced automated landing drones).

AESOP

AESOP is a very advanced type of expert system computer, apparently capable of thinking, learning, self-awareness — 'he' may even have emotions. When fully operational, *AESOP* does not need to be programmed, as he writes most of his own programs in response to external stimuli. *AESOP* is capable of operating the ship on his own, but normally acts in an advisory capacity unless the crew are incapacitated.

AESOP can write any and all programs for himself as though he has Computer 6 skill, and, if necessary, can program other computers with Computer 5 skill. He can also accept external programs, but these are input with a -25% chance of success due to the (by now) somewhat quirky structure of *AESOP's* internal logic due to his constant rewriting of his own programs. *AESOP* runs all the programs necessary to monitor ship functions.





DECK PLANS

1. THE BRIDGE
All major ship functions and programming access are controlled from various positions. The ship's sensors and individual Survey Modules may also be monitored or controlled.

2. AESOP
The central processor is protected behind a series of armoured panels, with no room for more than one individual at a time. Each crew member has a security code to release the panels. A special combination key is also available in the ship's locker (19) for use during major power failures.

3. LIFT SHAFT
The shaft runs the length of the ship allowing access to all decks, and acts as a distribution spine for the ship's utilities. The lift has a four person or ½ton capacity.

4. BATTERIES/TURRETS
The ship's weaponry (see specific game system details) is located here, controlled from positions on the bridge.

5. CAPTAIN'S STATEROOM
The only single occupancy berth on the ship, it is also the largest. The Captain's stateroom is the only one with direct terminal access to *AESOP*.

6. CREW STATEROOMS
Fitted out for double occupancy, all have built in fresher and kitchen facilities, and limited partitions give a sense of privacy.

7. GALLEY
The central galley is lareg enough for communual meals. Enough supplies are carried to last a full crew for six months.

8. COMMON AREA
An all-purpose entertainments and recreation lounge. Access to the ship's library of books and films, physical exercise machines and conference facilities are all provided.

9. POWER CIRCUITRY
The ship's power supply and electronics are carried through the spine of the ship.

10. DRIVE ROOMS
This area holds the power plant, jump and manoeuvre drives (**TRAVELLER**) or shielded atomic engines (**SF**) and other ship's machinery (life support, avionics, etc). A terminal to *AESOP* is also included, as well as limited access to the galley and entertainments facilities.

11-13. HANGAR, MODULE W'SHOP, LAUNCH CONTROL
This entire area is a giant airlock, as each of the walls may be lowered to allow the Survey Modules (which are stored here in pairs) to enter and leave via the external folding ramps. The hangar deck is also used as a maintenance garage for the Survey Modules and, short of total destruction, repairs are possible under most circumstances. A workshop (12) is provided for small scale repairs and the launch control room is normally used to oversee module operations

14. SICKBAY
The sickbay contains a medical computer/robot, which can be directly programmed by *AESOP*, as the central feature of the room. In addition to administering its wide stock of drugs as required (the sickbay should be treated as possessing Medical 3 skill), it can also monitor and maintain life support for a crew member too ill to be given immediate treatme
This effectively turns the sickbay into a low or storage berth.

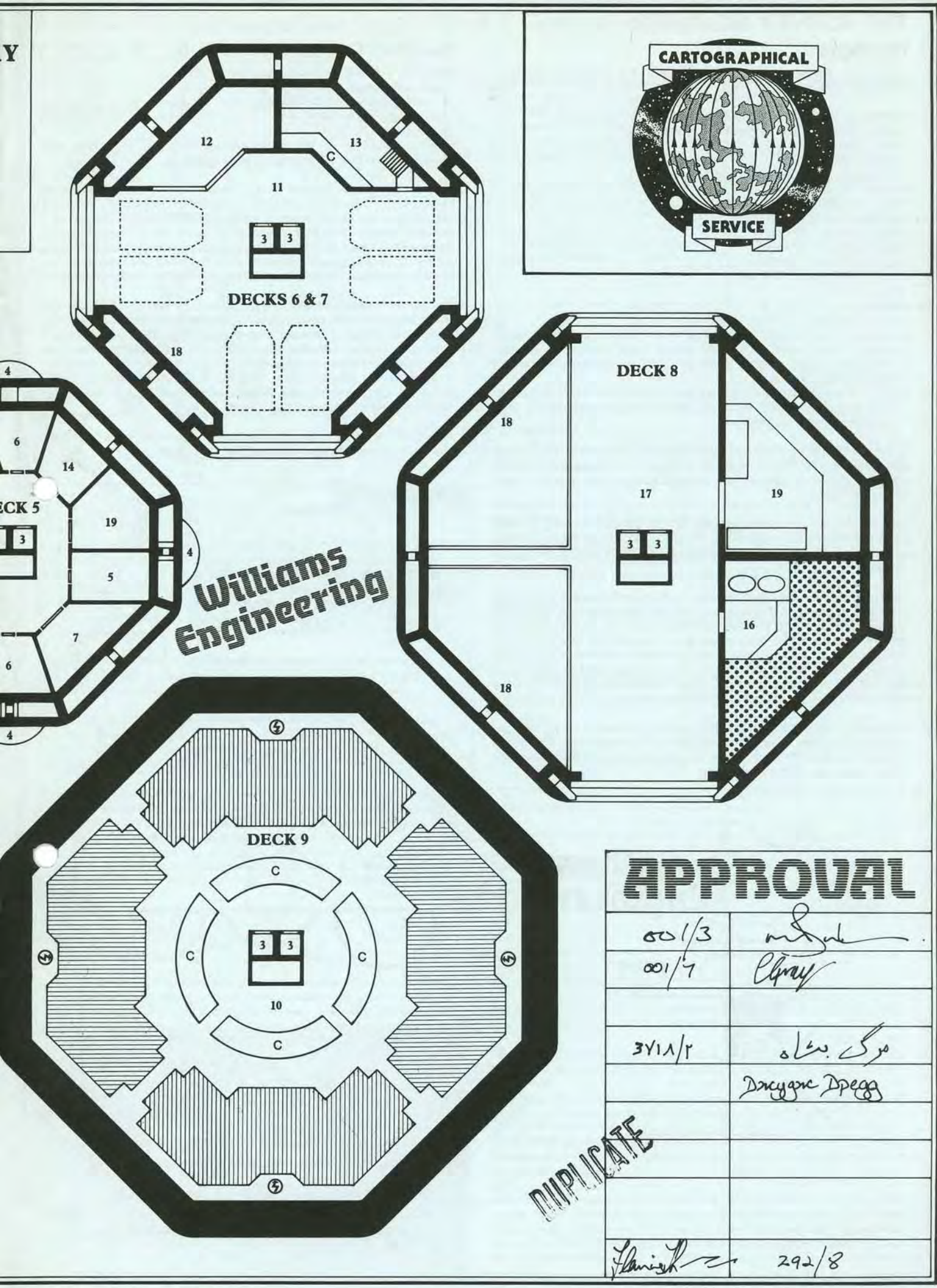
15. CREW AIRLOCK
A two person capacity airlock to allow EVAs without using the hangar deck (11) as an airlock. An external folding ramp is fitted.

16. CARTOGRAPHY ROOM
Part of *AESOP's* memory, the records of past and current assignments (which are classified informations), are held here, completely seperate from the normal library data. Any unauthorised attempt to enter this area will be actively resisted by *AESOP*, to prevent commercial or other subversion of the data.

17. CARGO BAY
Like the hangar deck, the cargo bay has retractable bulkheads to allow supplies to be easily loaded, although it is rarely depressurized. The entire area is lit by red light at all times.

18. FUEL COMPARTMENTS
Used as such in **TRAVELLER**, when using **STAR FRONTIERS** rules, these areas are spaced hull armour, storage areas or inaccessible machinery.

19. SHIP'S LOCKER
Immediate supplies are person equipment are stored here. The exact nature of the equipment is left to the discretion of the ship's crew. If using **TRAVELLER** rules, the referee should disallow items of TL 14+.


CARTOGRAPHICAL
SERVICE
DECKS 6 & 7
DECK 8
DECK 5
DECK 9
Williams Engineering
APPROVAL
DUPLICATE

THE SURVEY MODULES

TRAVELLER

The Survey Module statistics for **TRAVELLER** are given below in **STRIKER** format.

Cartographical Service G-Carrier (TL13)
Height: 3m (plus communications turret, 1.2m)
Width: 3m
Length: 6m
Total volume: 51 m^3 (useable volume 44.3m^3).
Weight: 41.3 tons
Price: 883,888Cr
Max Road Speed: 265(+) kph
Cross Country: 53(+) kph
Water Speed: 13(+) kph
Max Grav Speed: 540 kph
Cruise Grav Speed: 405 kph
NOE: 170 kph
Armour: 11
Target Size DMs: +1 high, +2 low
Equipment: searchlight and image enhancement output to viewscreen; 5000 power radio; 500 power radar sensing equipment; geological sound ranging gear; battle computer programmed to handle geophysical data.
Power: 6 megawatt fusion powerplant (consumes 9 litres of fuel per hour, fuel capacity of 7560 litres gives 840 hours of operation). Grav generators produce 1.453g.

Survey Modules see service in a wide range of planetary variations and are designed with this is mind. In addition to being capable of both surface and grav movement, they are built to travel over or under water where necessary.

The maximum awareness radius of the sensors carried is 500 kilometres, and they are sensitive enough to register all necessary data when the vehicle is travelling at speeds up to 170kph (NOE speed in grav mode).

On a planet with a gravity in excess of 1.453g, grav mode is impossible and the grav generators are used to improve the power to weight ratios for ground movement (hence the + signs after the figures given for ground speeds). When grav mode is not feasible for any reason (eg atmospheric disturbance), the grav generators are often used to keep the survey modules on the ground. They are also used to provide the required buoyancy during marine travel. While on surveys, the average speeds achieved are 80 kph (ground movement) or 160 kph (NOE).

As the crews (driver and co-driver) are often confined to the vehicles for days at a time, their living accommodation is quite extensive. Three tons of cargo capacity is taken up by the supplies and spares necessary during long treks in the wilderness.

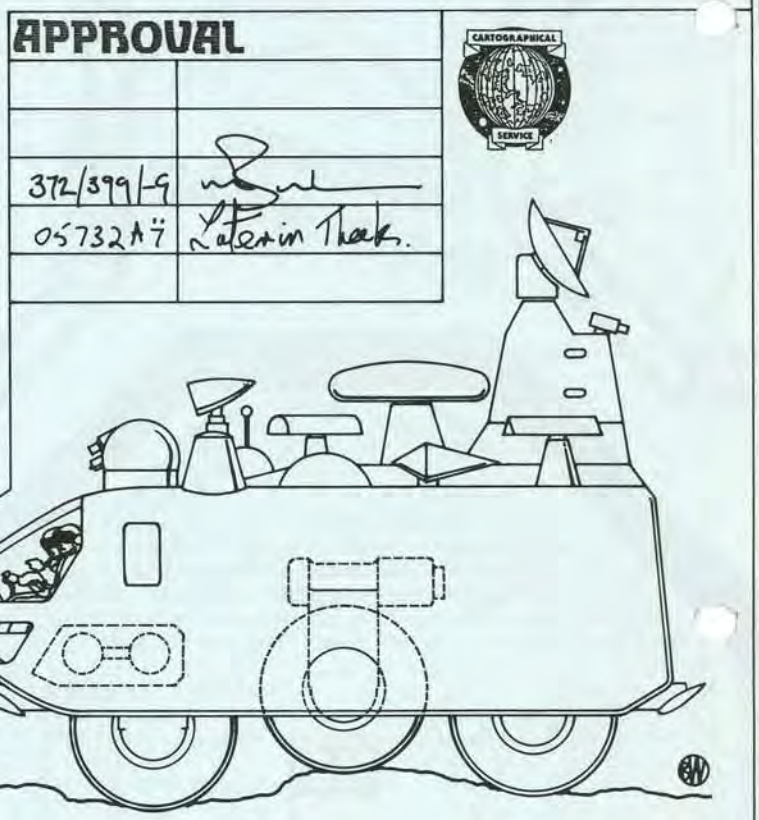
The STAR FRONTIERS game

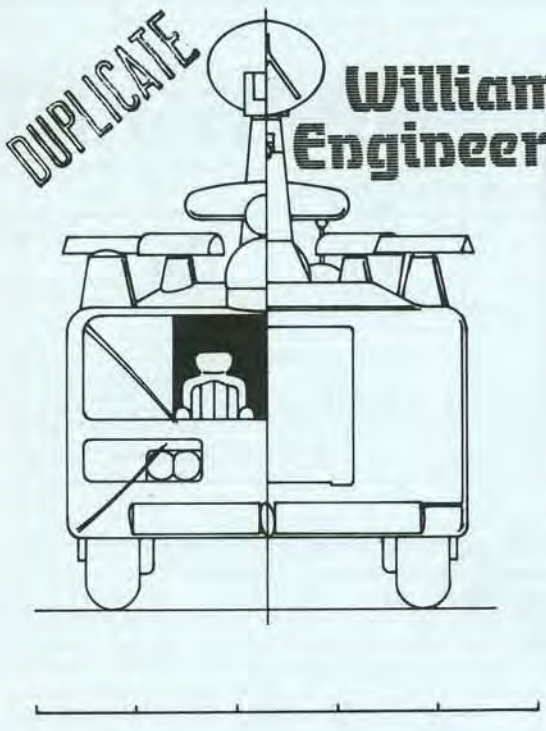
Cost: Cr 100,000 (rental is inapplicable)
Top/cruise speed: 90/50 kph
Water/NOE speed: 10/100 kph
Turn speed: 40 m/turn
Passengers: 2
Cargo: 10,000kg or 40 cubic metres (3,000kg of spares and equipment, the rest is allocated to crew quarters).

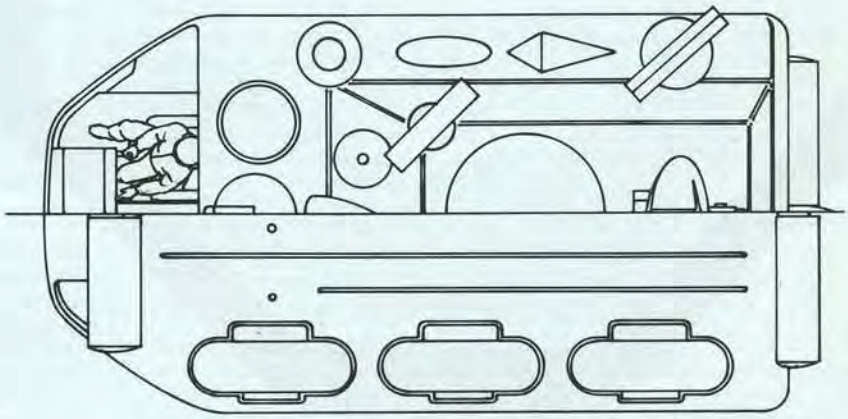
The Cartographical Service Survey Module is a heavy, long range version of the standard Explorer van, hardened (100 + d100 structure points) against a wide variety of external conditions and capable of a rocketed-assisted Nap of the Earth (NOE) flight. The Survey Module is powered by a type 4 hydrogen fusion generator with 850 hours of fuel in reserve, giving a range of operation of 80,000 +km. Life support for the crew of two (driver and co-driver) is also provided for this length of time.

The Survey module carries a long range detector system (500km range) which includes radar, energy sensors (see the Knight Hawks Campaign book) and geological sensors, a camera system with IR enhancers, a video radiophone including a computer data transfer system, two spacesuits (for hostile environments) and a level 3 computer (powered by the module's generator). The computer runs Analysis 4, Information Storage 4, Communications 2, Robot Management 3 (to run the sensor packages) and Life Support 1 programs.

A civilian version, lacking the geological survey sensors and flight capability, is manufactured and sold for Cr 85,000.







1. THE OUTCAST

During the routine survey of Helat 4, a particularly worthless world, the NPC crew of one of the Modules, Straker and Kaminsky, pick up readings of a large concentration of metal and a power source. ***AESOP*** advises an investigation, and all the other Modules are halted while Straker and Kaminsky head for the source of the enigmatic readings.

The other crews watch on their video screens as the investigators cross a ridge line and discover, half hidden in drifting dust, the skeleton of a starship. Kaminsky suits up and heads into the wreck on foot, his shoulder camera carrying the view to the rest of the Sarafand's crew....

Inside the ship is a wreck, skewered by a meteorite before it crashed. The bridge area is relatively intact, and Kaminsky manages to struggle to the pilot's position and extract the log tapes. He also finds the remains of the pilot, with a jagged hole in his helmet and skull and a corroded automatic pistol clutched in his hand.

When transmitted to ***AESOP***, the log tapes prove to be from the commercial explorer Outcast, lost ten years ago. A comparison with ***AESOP's*** library data reveals the ship's last position was 10 light years away.

The rest of the survey is as boring as usual, and all the Modules reach the Sarafand at Helat's North pole without further incident. In the meantime, ***AESOP*** has analysed the log tape, and discovered that the crew of the Outcast fell victim to a terminally debilitating spinal infection. Only the navigator, who had a prosthetic pelvis and spinal column, was immune, and he purposely brought the ship to Helat 4, well away from any inhabited worlds. Kaminsky and Straker are sent to the ...kbay, but both are perfectly healthy. Kaminsky is very upset by the scenes he saw aboard the wreck of the Outcast, and cannot even talk about it. He begins to withdraw from conversation, and to brood.

The Sarafand boosts out of the Helat system towards its next target, and as the last calculations before the Jump are being made, the subject of the Outcast comes up in conversation. Kaminsky lashes out at the nearest person (one of the player characters) and then retreats to his room, locking himself in and everybody out.

The next morning, Kaminsky does not appear at breakfast, and when somebody is sent to his room the door is open and Kaminsky is lying in his bed, dead. Something has gnawed its way out of his stomach....

Referee's Information

Kaminsky has fallen victim to the same 'disease' as killed the crew of the Outcast. In fact, the creature that killed him was roughly the size and shape of a Terran woodlouse, although infinitely more dangerous. The creature has used Kaminsky as a nest, and its young (2-12 specimens) are now at large.

The creature (the player characters may have the privilege of naming it) attacks warm-blooded creatures in order to feed and reproduce. It climbs to a point on the victim where nerve impulses are particularly strong (the base of the neck hidden under the hair on a human) and there ...serts its proboscis into the central nervous system, deadening all ...nsation with a powerful natural anaesthetic. Once established, it subborns its victim's nervous system to protect itself and in the process produces changes in behaviour, until ready to reproduce. The creature then paralyses its victim and migrates to a suitable nest — the stomach or chest cavity are nearly perfect. There it lays its eggs (the creature is asexual) and dies, killing the host as it does so. Six hours later the eggs hatch and the young eat their way out, looking for new nest sites....

Once the takeover has begun, the resources of the Sarafand are not sufficient to halt the process in a 'nest' person. However, the creatures can be stopped by systematically decompressing the ship. If the adventurers follow this course of action, the referee should judge how successful their measures are, and may choose to give hints that the PCs should not necessarily assume there is more than one creature. The referee should also feel free to have another crew member (preferably an NPC) fall victim the creatures, producing another 2-12 young.

If the adventurers succeed only in containing the creatures, it will be discovered that the life support system is overloading, despite the death of Kaminsky (and any others). Despite their small size, the creatures consume as much oxygen as a man....

Traveller:

2-12 Eaters Weight 0.01kg; Hits 1/0; Wounds/Weapon Special; Armour Jack (DM-3 to hit), A0, F9, S1

The STAR FRONTIERS game

2-12 Tiny Carnivores MV Slow; IM/RS 2/16; STA 18; ATT 90; DAM Special; NATIVE WORLD: Unknown.

2. SABOTAGE

In this scenario, one of the NPCs or (more interestingly, perhaps) one of the player characters should be an agent for the Sathar or Zhodani....

The referee should roll 1d6.

1. The Sarafand has been assigned to survey the supposedly uninhabited world of Yazrin 3. In fact, the planet is an enemy supply dump for their long range spyships. The enemy agent aboard the Sarafand will stop the mapping if possible or, if the base is discovered, he or she will set about eliminating the crew.

2-3. While the ship is in hyperspace, the agent sabotages ***AESOP***. With the computer partially disabled, the crew face the prospect of spending the rest of their (somewhat limited) future in the terrible void. ***AESOP*** must be repaired, but once this is done, the presence of a saboteur will be revealed. Obviously the agent must take steps to avoid discovery.

4. One of the player characters is implicated as a spy and assassin. The agent has planted incriminating documentation in the player character's possessions.... This particular line of adventure works well if the referee takes the accused player aside at any earlier point to impart some information of a trivial nature — but out of earshot of the other players.

5-6. If Mission 1 **The Outcast** (see above) has not been used, then roll again. If it has, the agent is a fanatic, unafraid to die for the cause, and has captured one of the creatures. Another outbreak of the creatures is the result, as the agent uses the creature to murder an NPC.

3. THE HAL SYNDROME

After entering the barren Quettyr system and surveying the planet Victoria II, ***AESOP*** malfunctions. During a meal time, instead of delivering the requested items, ***AESOP*** orders the galley to produce an endless stream of cold porridge. The computer's behaviour becomes more and more 'quirky' and starts to endanger crew lives, apparently intentionally.

For example: ***AESOP*** leaves the outer airlock door open and allows the inner door to be opened — only the emergency locks shut the hatch, but not before several crew members have suffered (mildly) from explosive decompression; ***AESOP*** locks the crew out of the engine room and bridge, and begins to broadcast an endless succession of ancient songs (in particular, *Oh, Mr Porter* and *I Like to go Swimming with Women*) over the ship's intercom system; and ***AESOP*** begins to refer to the Captain as 'Moriarty' and only speaks when addressed as 'Holmes'.

1-3. ***AESOP's*** central processor has been damaged by stray radiation. The computer must be stripped down and the damaged circuitry removed.

4-5. ***AESOP's*** errant behaviour is the result of a carelessly worded order to search the library banks. Instead of extracting information about the planet Victoria II, ***AESOP*** has accessed data about the Victorian Era and wrongly rewritten his main program. Purely by chance, the Victorian file marker was at the 'M's' — including Moriarty, Murder and Music Hall.

6. ***AESOP's*** behaviour is the result of manipulation by Cartographical Service headquarters. The crew are being subjected to a carefully controlled stress pattern to see how they react. ***AESOP*** is monitoring the crew and will terminate the exercise once they devise — and begin to implement — a strategy that he feels will remedy his 'madness', or earlier if he or the ship is in danger of destruction.

4. TANZIN 2

Tanzin is a K8 main sequence star with a planet positioned almost ideally in the ecosphere. After the initial probe report, a Contact mission was organised and despatched, but Tanzin 2 proved to be a great disappointment. As the Contact ship orbited the planet, it became clear that T2 was a barren and unpleasant world. Pausing only to skim the top of the oxygen-free atmosphere for samples, the Contact mission returned, the Tanzin file was given to the Cartographical Service, and the player characters' vessel was despatched to map the world — just so the files can be closed.

Although T2's gravity proves to be slightly weaker than standard, NOE flights and surveys prove to be impracticable due to the frequent and violent storms in the planet's atmosphere. All is apparently routine, despite some minor problems like wheel changes and a broken half-axle on one of the Survey Modules. The exploration of T2 proves to be as dull as it could possibly be, with no evidence of life, and no evidence as to why life never got started, despite the fact that it does not have the normal type of primeval atmosphere associated with lifeless worlds. The only moment of excitement is when one of the PC crews picks up readings of a cavern system in an inappropriate series of rock formations.

Tanzin's condition is due to the release of a potent biological weapon into the atmosphere of the planet over 5,000 years ago. The spores mutated as soon as they were out of the laboratory, and attacked all life, using up tremendous quantities of oxygen is the process. Eventually, the biosystem broke down completely and all life on Tanzin 2, from the bottom of the ocean to the tops of mountains was dead. The oxygen in the atmosphere was locked into complex chemical compounds. During the intervening millenia, the spores have been dormant, but now some have been revitalised by being carried into a Survey Module on the suits of the crew who repaired the half-axle.

The intial symptoms of infection by the spores, which appear after 12 hours, are tiredness, nausea and blurred vision. The infected crew are already suffering from these symptoms, although it is hardly surprising that they are tired after the drive from South pole to North pole. Twelve hours after that, the symptoms will grow progressively worse, with a general lassitude, muscular aches and complete loss of appetite overcoming the victim. The spores are infectious once the initial symptoms have appeared.

TRAVELLER characters undergo the equivalent of rapid ageing (though without obvious physical effects such as greying hair etc), treating 1 hour as 1 year for the purposes of the spores progression, and rolling on the ageing table every four hours once 'old' enough to do so. Characters who have a characteristic reduced to zero go into a coma; if a characteristic drops below zero, that character is dead. Medical skill gives a DM of +1 per level of skill to the ageing saving throw.

Characters in the STAR FRONTIERS game suffer an S8/D1000+ infection. Characters using the Medical Cure Infection subskill suffer a -30% chance of success and will only halt the progress of the spores for 10 hours. Another successful Cure Infection roll is required every 10 hours to stave off the effects of the spores.

The only chance of defeating the spores is to examine the strange cavern formations some 3,000 km from the pole. These caverns are a military research bunker from 5,000 years ago, the last attempt the Tanzinites made to defeat the spores.

Once there, the bunker is in remarkably good condition as it has been sealed since the disaster. If ***AESOP*** is given samples of the written language (transmitted to him via suit video cameras) found in the bunker, he can analyse and translate it in 1d6+6 hours. The Tanzinites were close to a breakthrough, but the spores eventually won....

Medical 2 will allow a character to understand the nature of the Tanzinite research into the spores, and a roll of 9+ (**TRAVELLER**, DMs +1 per 4 hour period spent in analysis, and this can be repeated every four hours, but no treatment can be administered to spore victims during this time) or a successful Cure Infection roll at -40% (+10% per ten hour period spent in research, and the roll can be repeated after a further 10 hours, although Cure Infection rolls on patients will not be possible during a period so spent) will provide the necessary antidote.

5. THE BONUS

While surveying the planetary system of Oula, the F8 star in a binary system, it is discovered that the F3 companion star also has a planet, one that the initial robot probe missed completely. This kind of discovery occurs all the time, so mission commanders have the authority to alter the mission profile and explore newly discovered worlds in addition to those already targetted for mapping. As such initiatives are approved of by headquarters, the crew often get the chance to 'enjoy' longer 'Bonus' missions and see another very boring world.

The survey of Oula 2/1 begins by following the usual routine. Soon after the ship lands at the second pole, however, the module crews (including the PCs) are contacted by the ship with the message that "We've just discov...." before contact is lost completely.

1-2. The communications satellite linking the ship and the modules has been struck by a tiny piece of anti-matter and destroyed. Contact is re-established when (or if) the modules move into the zone covered by another satellite. There is a 1 in 6 chance that the one of the other satellites will suffer a similar fate, or that the ship will be damaged before it leaves orbit.

3-4. The planet is very rich in superdense elements, which are being mined by a large corporation without the knowledge of the authorities or any competitors. To protect their interests, the company have destroyed the satellites with a missile, and have stationed armed teams to make sure the Survey Modules do not return to the ship.

Although the ship itself is too strong for the corporation's men to handle, one of their own armed vessels will arrive in 2-12 days.

5-6. As in 3 above, except that the mining operation is being conducted by hostile aliens, Zhodani or Sathar, depending upon the game system.

CONCLUSION

Those seeking ideas for further adventures need look no further than *SHIP OF STRANGERS*, the novel of Bob Shaw from which the **Sarafa** and the Cartographical Service are taken.

The missions outlined above need not be the only use to which the **Sarafand** is put. The potential for continued use of the **Sarafand** in a campaign is enormous, as it allows the referee to introduce almost anything without too much disruption of what has gone before, and gives the player characters the feeling that they are exploring virgin territory and that they matter (in a small way) in the overall scheme of things.

The authors would like to thank Bob Shaw for his assistance in supplying the necessary background material which made this article possible.

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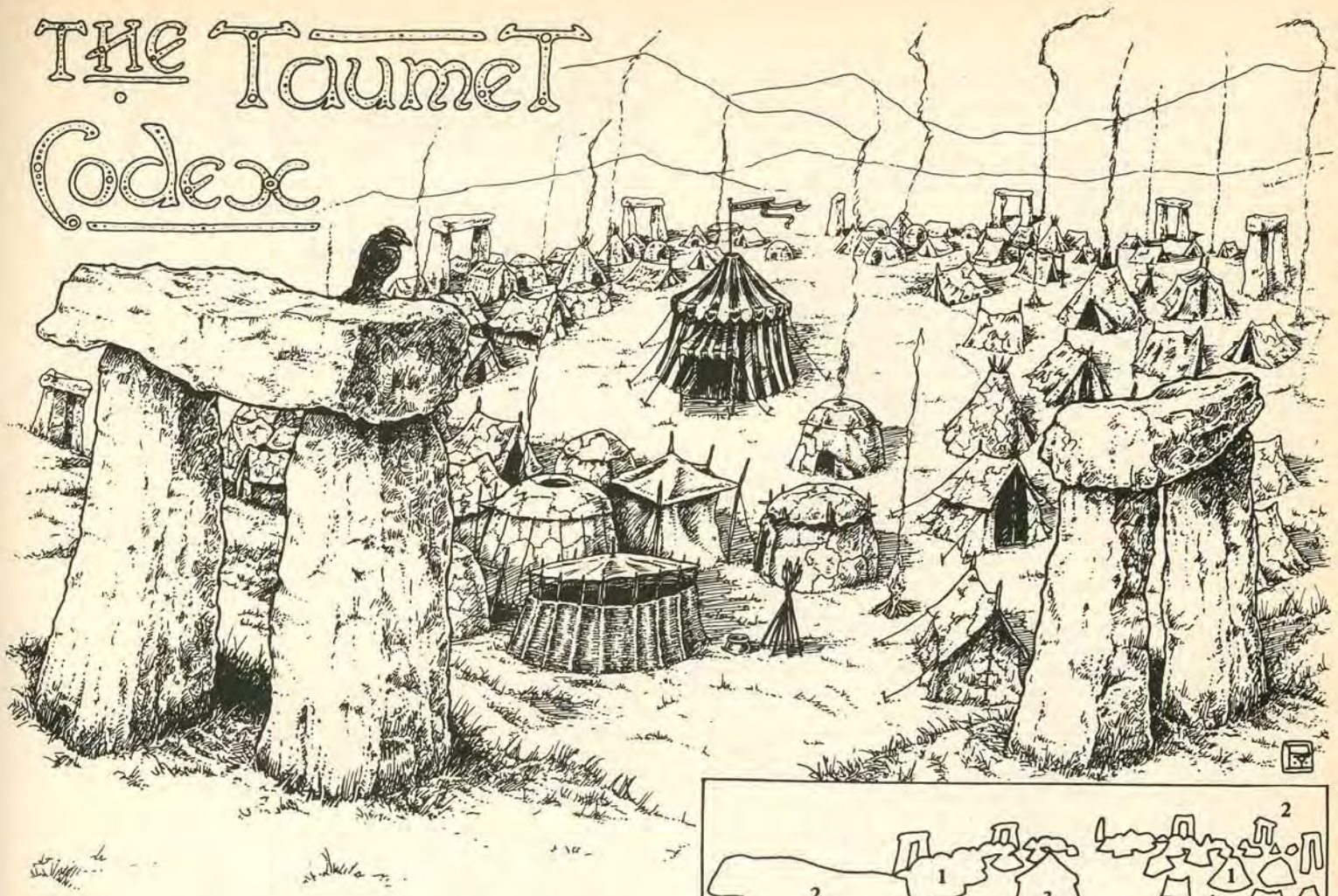
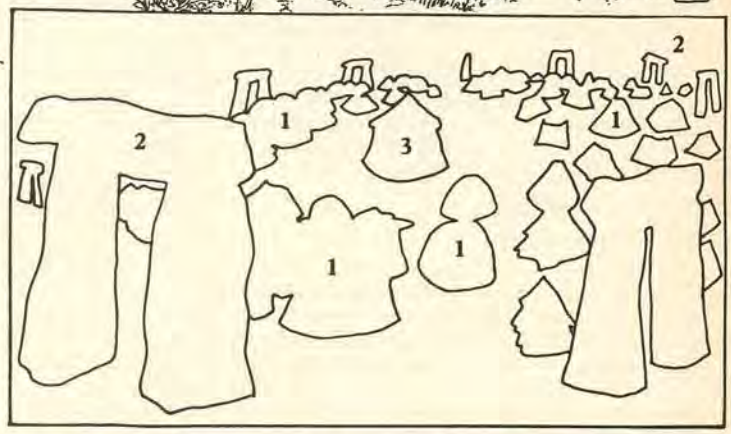
The Taumet Codex





by Andrew Swift

A Brief Encounter for parties of 5-8 AD&D® game characters of 9th level or higher....

Introduction

Brief Encounters are intended to introduce new game ideas in a ready-to-play setting. Dungeon Masters can introduce this material as part of an adventure in their own game worlds, or as an encounter to keep the players on their toes.

If you will be playing a character in this Brief Encounter, you should stop reading here. The remaining information is for the DM alone.

Unlike previous Brief Encounters where information has been presented for a range of character levels, **The Taumet Codex** is designed only for use with powerful, high level characters. All the information necessary to use the Brief Encounter is presented, but standard data, such as statistics for simple monsters, has been omitted because any DM running a high level campaign should have no difficulty in developing such details.

One 'way in' to the adventure is provided by way of example. However, the Taumet will provide a much more exciting challenge for your players if it is introduced into a campaign gradually, a piece at a time....

Background

In the small town of Rembus, far from civilisation, the people are confused and alarmed. After years of struggle against the surrounding humanoid tribes, the town knew peace and prospered under the protection of its garrison and the Wyrmhorn, a battle relic said to possess considerable powers of protection. For twelve years Rembus prospered, after the decisive defeat of the tribes at the Gravevale, but now the stink of war and death has returned.

Civil war and rebellion drew the garrison away, and the townsfolk formed their own militia. Then came rumours of a giant dragon, greater than any heard of in tale or legend, leading an army of creatures in attacks on villages, farms and hamlets. Survivors brought tales of destruction and death and finally, in the midst of a terrible storm, the main temple at Rembus was burnt to the ground. When the storm and fire had passed, the priests searched in vain for the Wyrmhorn, but it was gone, taken by some attacker or destroyed in the fire.

With the Wyrmhorn gone, crops burned and hunting scarce, Rembus faces collapse. The Town Elders sit in constant debate, and are able to decide nothing. The priests are, in this crisis at least, more worldly than the Elders, and have turned to the player characters for help....

Dungeon Master's Information

The townsfolk are ignorant of the true nature of affairs. The attacks on farms and villages are the work of the tribes, who have now increased in numbers to a semblance of their old power under a new leader, the human wizard, Kerinor. The tribes are now permanently camped at the scene of their defeat, the Gravevale, growing in strength and resolve and awaiting Kerinor's spell casting.

It is Kerinor, aided by the tribes, who has started the rumours of the dragon, aided by his sorcerous powers in creating illusions to scare the simple and **fireballs** and **lightning bolts** to destroy them. Complete destruction and removal of all signs of magic have fuelled fears that a dragon has indeed arisen as the new commander of those who wish humanity ill. The surprise attack on the Temple at Rembus, in the middle of a fortuitous storm, and the taking of the Wyrmhorn, is the culmination of the first part of Kerinor's plotting.

Kerinor has now withdrawn to the Gravevale and the centre of the tribal encampment to work upon the next phase of his plan: the creation and awakening of the Taumet, a construct-dragon, from the instructions he has found in the Taumet Codex and the magical relics, including the Wyrmhorn, that he has gathered over the years. With the Taumet at his command, Kerinor believes his true power will be unbound, and all the world will learn to fear and obey him.

The DM should place the town of Rembus on a route to one of his major adventuring sites, and allow the player characters to rest up after a trip across the wilderness. However the player characters get involved, by agreeing to help the Rembus priests to discover the whereabouts of the Wyrmhorn, by interfering on their own account, or by stumbling across the tribes, they will have to stop Kerinor before he can complete the process of creating the Taumet. Once the Taumet exists, the player characters will be in as much danger as everyone else....

The Course of Play

The town of Rembus is in turmoil following the destruction of the Temple and the Elders' moral paralysis. Many of the townsfolk are in the process of leaving, selling what they can, and loading the rest onto carts, wagons and pack animals, and the south road is thronged with people and their animals. The north road is empty.

Fifteen miles north of Rembus, the road climbs into dark and forbidding hills, with ancient, scarred ruins on many hill-tops, reminders of the area's recent violent past. As the road drops into the first of many vales, the player characters will be attacked by a large sub-tribe of hobgoblins mounted on dire wolves, led by a tribal shaman (7th level) and accompanied by a band of 2-12 ogres. These creatures will attack with little subtlety and no organisation, and withdraw once they have taken more than 10% casualties. The DM may repeat this encounter, if necessary, to goad the player characters into action.

The player characters may easily follow the retreating hobgoblins or, if they have taken any prisoners, extract information about where the tribes are based; the Gravevale. This now noisome valley is a further three miles north, wreathed in the smoke of cooking fires and the stench of hundreds of hobgoblins and their allies.

The Gravevale

The first illustration in the Brief Encounter shows the view over the Gravevale, the hobgoblin encampment and is a map for the encounter that follows. The hobgoblins are divided into several, mutually suspicious sub-tribes. They and their allies, ogres, bugbears, a troll or three, a family of hill giants, a festering of ghouls and several men and dwarves occupy a large number of wattle shelters, hide tents and lean-tos (1), built around and among a circle of standing stones (2). At the very centre of the circle, separate from the rest, is a handsome and ornate campaign tent (3), such as a general or noble might use, and tethered (and hobbled) outside this is a centaur. It is here that Kerinor lives, at the very heart of his evil army.

Because of the rag-tag nature of Kerinor's forces, the player characters will be able to sneak into the camp by pretending to be members of the army. Providing reasonable precautions are taken to disguise the demi-humans in the party (making them appear to be captives, for example), the adventurers will not be challenged. The DM may even allow them to get away with starting minor fights (providing no magic is used), as Kerinor's troops are very ill-disciplined. Once in the camp the player characters will have no difficulty in learning (whether by overhearing the hobgoblins talking among themselves or by asking questions) the rough outline of what is really happening; that Kerinor exists, that he intends casting some terrible spell to summon or create a dragon, and that, once this is done, the army will be unstoppable and hundreds — even thousands! — will flock to Kerinor's banners. They will also hear the word *Taumet* mentioned frequently. Any character who can speak hobgoblin will recognise the word as meaning 'DragonFather'

Kerinor's Tent

The hobbled and tied centaur is Eidrial Feathertail, who was unfortunate enough to be captured by the hobgoblins and has now been **charmed** by Kerinor. The centaur has orders to announce the approach of anyone to Kerinor, who is inside the tent.

Eidrial Feathertail: AC 5; MV 18"; HD 4; hp 20; #AT 2; D 1-6/1-6; SA human weapons; Int Ave; AL N/CG (but charmed); Size L; xp 165; THACO 15; MM14.

Inside the tent is Kerinor, surrounded by his spell books, magical impedimenta and the relics he intends to use in the creation of the Taumet. If given a warning by Eidrial, Kerinor will cast **protection from good** and begin the creation process immediately.

Kerinor: AC 2; MV 9"; MU14; hp 45; #AT 1; D by weapon; SA/D spells, **bracers of defence AC 4**, **dagger of venom**; AL NE; Size M; xp 5000; THACO 16; S 9, I 18, W 10, C 15, D 16, Ch 16.
Spells memorised: Any five from each of 1st-3rd levels; **fear**, **monster summoning II**, **polymorph other**, **curse**; **animate dead**, **Bigby's interposing hand**, **cloudkill**, **wall of force**; **anti-magic shell**, **invisible stalker**; and **delayed blast fireball**.

If not stopped, Kerinor will emerge from his tent one hour after the player characters arrive in the camp, and carry out a meaningless ritual dance. He will then bring out the relics, one at a time, and lay them out on the ground. Making bold predictions of the fall of humanity, he will begin donning the various relics; his troops will be too horrified or fascinated by what is happening to intervene for 3-10 rounds.

To create the Taumet, Kerinor must wear the relics that he has gathered: the Wyrmhelm, the Cloak of Cloud, the White Shield, the Fire Claws and the Venomlance. He will then read out a passage from the Taumet Codex which Eidrial will hold up for him, and the Taumet will appear, although not in quite the manner that Kerinor anticipates....

The Relics

The Taumet relics are, for the most part, sentient rather than truly intelligent, but will still attempt to influence their current owners into finding the other relics and the Taumet Codex. Two or more relics can add their Ego scores together to give a new personality value, so that any creature will end up dominated sooner or later, given that the five relics have a total personality score of 76.

The powers given below for individual relics apply only when less than the full set of five is worn by a single character. If all five are worn by a single character they have a somewhat different and unfortunate effect. The wearer's personality is totally subsumed by the relics and, if the Taumet Codex is present, the wearer will have no choice but to declaim the passage that creates the Taumet.

Once this is done, the wearer collapses in agony, and his or her final and fatal transformation into the Taumet begins.

The Fire Claws

These two clawed gauntlets of red metal scales are gem encrusted and act as **bracers of defence AC 0**. They act as **shortswords +5** in combat, and as the functional equivalent of a **ring of fire resistance**. Because they are unwieldy, it is impossible for a character to wear the Fire Claws and use any other item, except for its partner relics. The Fire Claws are unintelligent, but have an Ego of 15 (Swords, **DMG** p167).

The White Shield

This is a single dragon scale, which has been carefully worked into a small **shield +4**. It provides immunity from any attack that causes less than 10 points of damage, and a bonus of +4 to saving throws vs cold based attacks. Also, no dragon will attack the wielder of this shield, except in self-defence. The White Shield has an Ego of 13.

The Venom Lance

This evil (but otherwise non-aligned) polearm can be wielded as a **spear +3** by a foot soldier or as a heavy horse **lance +4** by a horseman. Creatures struck by this weapon (Int 13, Ego 13) must save vs poison at -4 or take an additional 3-18 points of damage for 1-4 rounds. The Venom Lance can also **detect good** and **cause fear** (once per day), and communicate empathically with its wielder.

The Cloak of Clouds

This grey, wispy and tattered looking cloak allows its wearer to cast the following spells as though a 12th level MU, once per day: **feather fall**, **gust of wind**, **fly**, **lightning bolt**, **control weather**. Any creature who touches the wearer of the Cloak of Clouds must make a saving throw vs death magic or suffer 6-36 points of electrical damage. The Cloak has an Ego of 13.

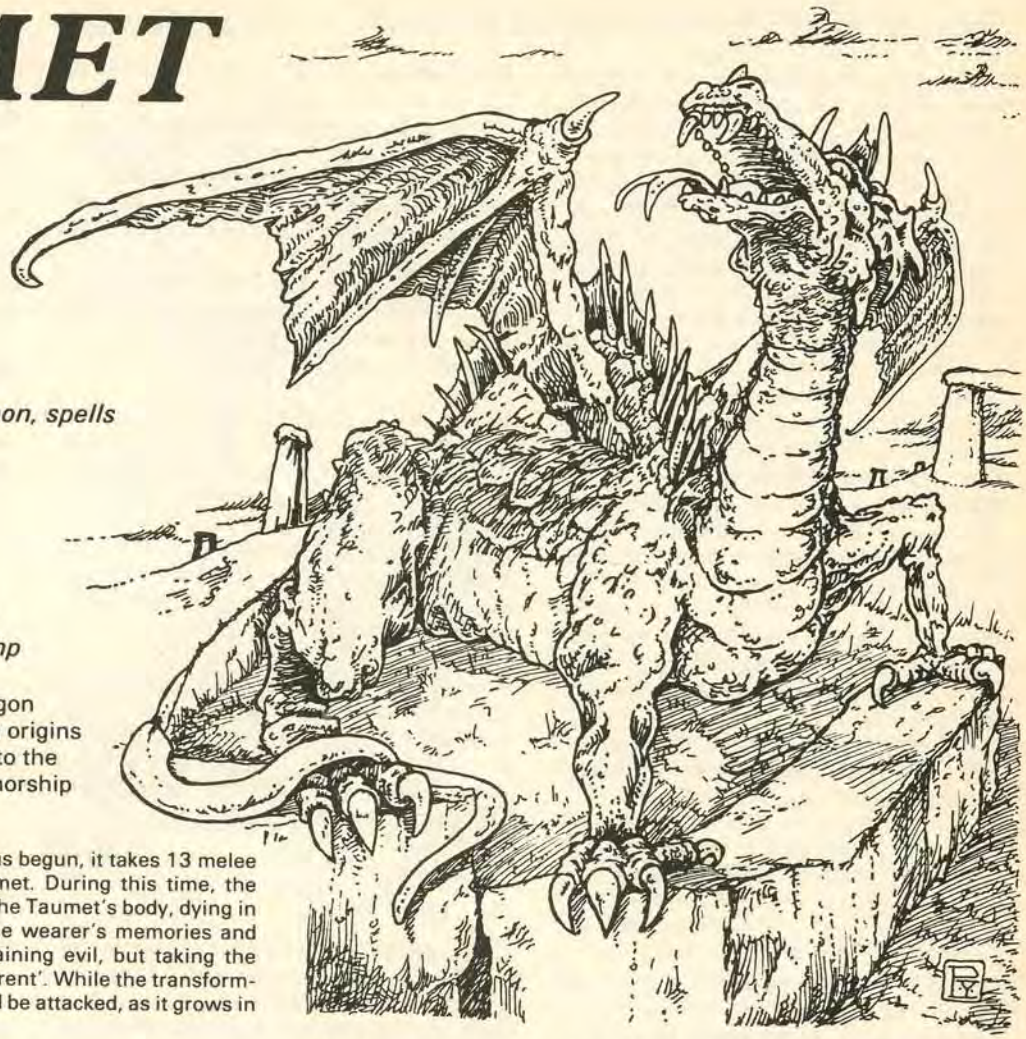
The Wyrmhelm

This helm is cast in the form of a snarling dragon head, so elaborate and stylised as to be utterly useless as armour. However, its wearer can understand the tongues of all dragonkind and cast **charm monster** (no saving throw) on any dragon once per week. The wearer can also cast **command** 3 times per day. It has an Ego of 9.

New Monster (Unofficial)

The

TAUMET



FREQUENCY: *Unique*
No APPEARING: *1*
ARMOUR CLASS: *Variable*
MOVE: *3"/18"*
HIT DICE: *Variable*
% IN LAIR: *Nil*
TREASURE TYPE: *Nil*
No OF ATTACKS: *3*
DAMAGE/ATTACK: *Variable*
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Breath weapon, spells*
SPECIAL DEFENCES: *Variable*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Standard*
INTELLIGENCE: *Genius*
ALIGNMENT: *Variable Evil*
SIZE: *S-L*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *Nil*
Attack/Defence Modes: *Nil/Nil*
LEVEL/XP VALUE: *X/18750+25hp*

The Taumet is a magically-created dragon construct, made from five relics whose origins are lost in the mists of time according to the instructions in a book of unknown authorship called the Taumet Codex.

Once the process of creating the Taumet has begun, it takes 13 melee rounds to develop into the complete Taumet. During this time, the wearer of the relics is used as the basis of the Taumet's body, dying in the process. The Taumet takes some of the wearer's memories and alignment during its growth, always remaining evil, but taking the Lawful, Neutral or Chaotic attitude of its 'parent'. While the transformation takes place, the Taumet can attack and be attacked, as it grows in power and size:

Round	AC	HD	Damage	SA/SD
1&2	5	1	1-4/1-4/1-6	Immune to attacks causing less than 4 points of damage
3&4	3	3	1-6/1-6/1-8	Immune to 1st level spells, +1 or better weapons to hit
5&6	1	5	1-6/1-6/2-12	Non-edged weapons cause half damage
7	0	7	1-6/1-6/2-16	Breath weapon usable, +2 or better weapons to hit
8	-1	9	1-6/1-6/3-18	Immune to 2nd level spells and attacks causing less than 8 points of damage
9	-2	11	1-8/1-8/3-24	+3 or better weapons to hit
10	-3	13	1-8/1-8/3-30	Immune to 3rd level spells
11	-4	15	1-10/1-10/3-36	Spell use, immune to attacks causing less than 12 points of damage
12	-5	17	1-10/1-10/4-40	Immune to 4th level spells and damage from non-edged weapons
13	-6	18	1-12/1-12/5-50	+4 or better weapons to hit

If the Taumet suffers more than 40 points of damage in a single round during this period of growth, the process will be halted for that round, and in the early stages this will be sufficient to cause the Taumet to disassociate into its component relics.

Like all normal dragons, the Taumet has a set number of hit points per hit dice, but this depends on the original wearer of the relics:

Wearer	hp/HD
MU or Illusionist	4hp
Thief, assassin	6hp
Cleric, monk, druid	8hp
Fighter, ranger, paladin	10 hp

The Taumet can breath 3 times per day, but can choose what form this takes; either as a black, blue, green, red or white dragon. Once it has the use of spells, it can cast, once per day, those spells that the relics knew at the time of the transformation or 5 x 1st, 5 x 2nd, 5 x 3rd, 4 x 4th, 4 x 5th and 2 x 6th level spells as though it were a 13th level magic user.

If the Taumet is reduced to zero hit points, it will not be killed, but forced to disassociate into its component relics and the withered remains of the original wearer. The relics cannot be destroyed except by the application of earth-shattering magic (depending upon individual DM's campaigns), but they can be kept separate to prevent the Taumet reforming around another wearer.

The bane of the Taumet is the Wyrmhorn. When this horn is sounded within 60' of the construct it must make a saving throw at -7 against death magic or dissociate into its component relics. A successful saving throw still means that the Taumet has taken 8-80 points of damage, but is immune to the effects of the Wyrmhorn until the next sunrise. The DM will have to decide how best to place the Wyrmhorn in the campaign.

The Taumet Codex

This tome has, over the course of the centuries since it was written, been badly mistreated, burnt and partially destroyed. The only remaining pieces of the Codex, now bound into a new book little concerned with the truth of the Taumet, describe the relics and some of their powers, although not the fact that they will attempt to dominate their wearer(s).

The last stained and partial section of the Codex concerns the creation of the Taumet, and is little more than a phonetic speech (in an unintelligible, forgotten tongue) to be read out in the presence of the wearer of the relics. "The Taumet", says the text, "will then be released upon the World and all its kindred."

Dungeon Masters using the **D&D®** game rules should note that the Taumet can be used as a variation on the drolem given on p31 of the Dungeon Masters Companion in the Companion Set.

DISPEL CONFUSION SPECIAL

With Special Thanks To Carl Sargent

This month and next, we have a departure from the regular **Dispel Confusion** column. We receive several questions each month which concern those spells in the **Players Handbook** which were expanded or revised when the **DMG** was published at a later date. Clearly, some of the information in the DMG would be useful to players, and concern aspects of magic which would be known by spell-casting characters.

In general terms, the answer is always that where the Players Handbook disagrees with the DMG, follow the DMG. But since not everyone has access to a DMG here is a brief resumé of the alterations made, along with comments and observations on some of the problems that have come up since.

The TSR team will still answer your individual rules queries. Send an SSAE with your question(s) if you want a personal reply to:
IMAGINE magazine (Dispel Confusion), TSR UK Ltd, The Mill, Rathmore Road, Cambridge CB1 4AD.

MAGIC USER SPELLS

FIRST LEVEL

Charm Person: Comments on various aspects of the charm spells will be discussed next month under the second level druidic spell charm person or mammal.

Detect Magic: The PH states that, apart from duration differences and the like, this spell is the same as the first-level clerical version. The DMG makes it clear that this is not so. Magic users have a 10% chance per level of experience of detecting the type of magic involved (alteration, enchantment/ charm, etc) in addition to detecting the strength of the magical emanations.

Enlarge: Shrewd players may have noted that objects are not so greatly affected by this spell as creatures, but the DMG makes it plain that one cannot 'squeeze someone to death in their armour' with this spell, because 'all garments and equipment worn by a subject of this spell should be considered to automatically drop off if held by straps, fasteners, otherwise to split away during growth.... Coats of mail, however, will be ruined if growth occurs while worn.' Unofficially, DMs might like to consider the possibility of giving magical armour a saving throw (perhaps as against a crushing blow) here. An option mentioned by the DMG is that an unwilling recipient of this spell must be touched in order for the spell to affect it, and of course there is a saving throw. Players who like the idea of doing in armoured enemies with this spell should negotiate this point with their DM.

Find familiar: PCs should be aware that the summoned familiar cannot be replaced by another while it still lives (even if sent away by the magic user) and that killing one's own familiar can have even worse consequences than the permanent hit point loss mentioned in the PH.

Message: An important extra detail given in the DMG is that this spell confers no extra linguistic abilities (ie, it isn't a variant of a **tongues** spell).

Sleep: Although this is specified as an area spell in the PH, the DMG notes that one can target it on a specific creature within the spell range and that any residual power will affect other vulnerable creatures within the area of effect. If this targeting option is chosen, the spell does not necessarily affect the lowest hit die creatures first.

Tenser's Floating Disc: An important detail in the DMG is that the caster of this spell cannot ride upon the disc, although it doesn't specifically bar others from doing so. It might be worth DMs extending this bar to include all characters and creatures.

SECOND LEVEL

Detect Evil: This spell will only reveal the intensity of the evil, and not the alignment involved, so it is not the same as the first level clerical version (cf, comments on the first level clerical spell detect evil — next issue).

Levitate: A crucial fact not mentioned in the PH is that levitating characters suffer extreme penalties on 'to hit' rolls with missile fire, and also when 'actually swinging a weapon (such as a sword)'. It is not clear exactly which weapons fall into the latter category. Some weapons are actually totally unusable by levitating characters (DMG, p52) but the DMG warns DMs to 'let your players find this out for themselves!' Acting in the spirit of this, I shan't reveal the hit penalties with other weapons either; but players and DMs should sort out just what a character might be expected to know about combat while levitated, and what will have to wait for the first experience.

Rope Trick: An important detail omitted in the PH is that there is a 'one-way window' effect with this spell; those outside the extradimensional space cannot see in, of course, but those inside can see out (into the 'normal world') as through a window.

THIRD LEVEL

Fly: There are some penalties applying to weapon use by flying characters similar to those affecting levitating characters (see comments above), but they are much less severe and only affect 'slinging or swinging weapons'. Once again, players will have to reach agreement on what is known about this by their characters.

FOURTH LEVEL

Charm Monster: See comments on the second-level druidic spell charm person or mammal.

Dig: This spell inflict 5-20 (5d4) points of damage if cast at a clay golem. No saving throw is mentioned, so none should be permitted.

Extension I: The DMG makes it clear that this spell must be cast by the magic user upon himself on the round immediately following the casting of the spell to be extended or else the extension is useless. In the event of one magic user casting extension upon another, this must be done during either the same round or the one following.

Minor Globe of Invulnerability: A crucial detail only found in the DMG is that the globe gives off 'a faint shimmering', so it should automatically be visible in dungeon settings, unless a strong light source such as **continual light** is affecting the location. Just how faint this shimmering is is not clear and the colour is not specified — there may not be one!

FIFTH LEVEL

Animate Dead: See comments on the third level clerical spell animate dead (next issue).

Cloudkill: The PH entry suggests clearly that only creatures of no more than six hit dice/levels are affected by this spell. This is not correct. The DMG states that 'any creatures staying within the cloud for more than one round, even though they have 7 or more hit dice/levels, will take 1-10 hit points of damage on the second and each succeeding round'.

Extension II: See comments on the fourth level magic-user spell extension I.

Wall of Iron, Wall of Stone: PCs would be aware that using these spells can raise certain problems regarding the stability of the wall, notably when using wall of stone to bridge chasms, etc. Details are found in the DMG and players should negotiate with DMs about how much exact information their PCs can be ruled to know. Unfortunately, neither the PH nor the DMG tell players how much damage a falling wall will do to creatures crushed beneath it when the spell is used as an offensive weapon (walls of iron can automatically be created in the air; walls of stone only have to merge with an existing stone formation at one point, and the PH states that they do not have to rest upon any firm foundation). Logically, such information should be part of the knowledge characters receive when they are taught the spell.

SIXTH LEVEL

Extension III: See comments on the fourth level magic-user spell Extension I.

Glassee: The DMG fills in the extra detail that the material affected retains its original strength.

Globe of Invulnerability: Unlike the minor globe (see comments above) the DMG does not state that this more powerful defensive globe shimmers. Thus, it should be considered to be invisible, except that spells such as **detect invisibility**, etc, should not reveal the presence of a globe, while more powerful spells such as **true sight/true seeing** obviously would.

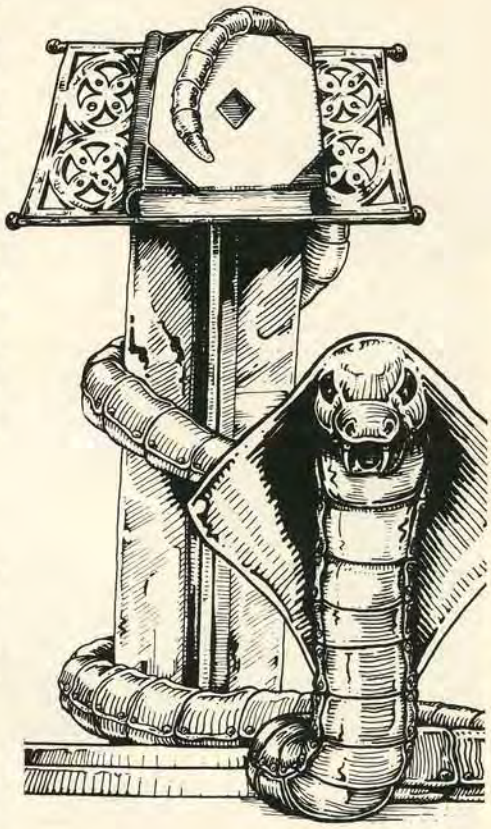
Otiluke's Freezing Sphere: The DMG fills in the detail that, if the sling-stone sized version of this spell is used, the missile has an effective range of 40 feet if hand-hurled (and any target within this range is considered to be at short range), but that the stone can be fired from a sling, of course.

Reincarnation: Just to tidy up a fairly trivial error in the DMG, a reference there for the DM to check comments on the 'sixth level clerical spell' of the same name obviously meant the seventh level druidic spell.

Spiritwrack: The DMG notes an important restriction; a magic user may only possess one specially prepared vellum sheet at any one time. Nor is it possible to prepare two sheets naming the same creature at the same time; the second simply has no effect.

Stone to Flesh: It is possible, the DMG notes, to use this spell as a kind of **passwall** in that one can create a cylindrical aperture in solid stone with minimum diameter 1' and maximum 3'. The length of the flesh cylinder (yuk) created will, of course, be governed by the volume restriction on the spell (9 cubic feet per level of the magic user).

SEVENTH LEVEL



Drawmij's Instant Summons: The gem used as the material component will have a magical inscription upon it naming the object to be summoned; this is invisible and cannot be read by anyone without a **read magic** spell (except the spellcaster). Also, while the PH notes that magic users of 15th level and higher may be able to summon items from other planes with this spell, the DMG specifies that items in a **Leomund's secret chest** (which are on the ethereal plane) cannot be summoned.

EIGHTH LEVEL

Clone: Only humans, demi-humans and humanoids may be cloned.

Glassteel: the effective AC of glassteel is AC1.

Mass Charm: See comments on second level druidic spell **charm person or mammal**. Obviously, saving throw modifiers are applied to each individual affected as a function of damage inflicted on that individual by allies of the magic user.

Permanency: Although the PH warns players that using the spell upon a creature results in a constitution drain, it does not inform players that this can also happen when the spell is used with respect to some object. The exact percentage chance is not given here (see DMG p46) but PCs would be aware that this is a possibility.

Serten's Spell Immunity: The PH lists only half the saving throw bonuses this spell affords, the rest are in the DMG, with the statement that 'although it should be rather obvious, the spell works against nearly any form of enchantment/charm', and lists the following bonuses:

forget, hypnotism, ray of enfeeblement: +9
antipathy/sympathy, confusion, mass suggestion: +7
chaos, feeblemind, Otto's irresistible dance: +5

The DMG also states that 'any other such spells can be adjudicated from the list in the PH', so that unspecified spells of this type should receive a saving throw bonus. Obviously this must be at least +5 for any enchantment/charm spell, but I have not been able to detect the logic determining which spells get which type of bonus. It seems clear that the +9 bonus applies only to relatively low level spells, but some spells receiving the +7 bonus (eg **antipathy/sympathy**) are clearly higher level than those receiving +5 in some instances (eg **quest**). Moreover, some very low level spells (**scare, command**) get only a +7 bonus. Nor is the modifier a simple function of spell level or number of creatures potentially affected, since **ray of enfeeblement** (a second level spell affecting one creature) gets a +9 bonus while **command** (a first-level spell affecting one creature) gets only +7. The sharp-eyed may also be wondering how this spell can possibly add +5 to the saving throw against **geas** when there is no saving throw against this spell. It is unfortunate that the DMG claims that the mechanics for this are obvious, but DMs and players will have to find logical house rules. There are some important omissions from the total list in PH and DMG — **fumble** being especially noteworthy — and players should negotiate with DMs on what saving throw modifiers Serten's Spell Immunity actually gives.

Symbol: The saving throw against this spell is given in the PH as 'special' but with the exception of the **symbol of fear** variant, exactly what this is is not specified in either PH or DMG. However, in the PH the saving throw for the seventh level clerical version of the spell (these spells do overlap; the magic-user variety contains more options, but **symbol of persuasion** is unique to the clerical version) is given as 'Neg', so for the magic-user version a standard saving throw versus spells might be given. It could be ruled that the **symbol of death** should involve a saving throw against death magic rather than spells.

NINTH LEVEL

Prismatic Sphere: The DMG is explicit that the sphere can only be brought down (if one is using the correct spells, one at a time, for each of the seven globes, rather than having a **rod of cancellation**, etc) if the globes are negated in the correct order, starting with the red and finishing with the violet.

Illusionist Spells, page 52 ☞

COBRA

You know that phrase they use in cinema trailers for the umpteenth remake of *Battlestar Galactica* or whatever: 'It's back! And it's better than ever!' Well, this applies very well to the latest TSR/SPI wargame re-issue, **Cobra**. The original game was published in **S&T**™ magazine issue 65, back in 1977, and covered the Allied 1944 summer offensive in France, from the initial Normandy breakout in late July to the battle of the Falaise pocket in mid-August.

Cobra enjoys a high reputation as one of the better WWII operational games, so its re-issue is very welcome. But what is even better is that the game now comes in an expanded version, which extends the game to cover the period from the initial D-Day landings up to the start of Operation Cobra itself. So it is possible to play through the entire Normandy campaign, from the first Allied footholds to the final collapse of the Germans.

The expansion comprises an extra map-sheet which fits onto the north of the original map, and shows the landing beaches and the Cotentin peninsula. There are also another 200 counters so as to include the extra units necessary — for instance, the Allied para-troopers and commandoes. Many of the extra counters are in fact duplicates of the original counter set, but carrying the new set-up positions for the expanded game, which greatly facilitates getting the game ready for play.

The rule-book has been newly laid out, and though the original rules have not been re-written at all, new rules have been added to cover beach landings, capture of ports, naval bombardment, and so on.

The game system is based around a sequence of play which is essentially move, fight, and mechanised units move again. The correct use of tanks is very important if you are to do well at Cobra. The Allies must use their armour to exploit breakthroughs achieved by infantry attacks, while the German must exploit to the full his powerful Panzer divisions, moving them up to make local counterattacks against Allied spear-heads, and then retiring them behind the lines ready for the next counterattack.

Cobra is a good players' game — it is evenly balanced, and thus a good competitive challenge. Bear in mind that a game covering the whole of Normandy cannot go into the individual D-Day landings in great detail, so if you are looking for something on the fight for the beaches you will have to look elsewhere. But to my mind this is the best playable game on the Normandy campaign — it plays quickly and smoothly, and is very enjoyable. A most welcome re-issue.

Roger Musson

STAR TREK III

Despite the sub-heading 'Starship Combat Game', the **Star Trek III** boardgame is more than a game of die-rolling fire-power. Tactics and a good working knowledge of the rules possibilities play an all-important part, for this is quite a technically oriented system, not the type that can be played and learnt simultaneously.

It features three booklets covering simplified and advanced play; two sheets of die-cut counters depicting various starships, planets and basic markers; and a 'board' which comprises two sheets of 22x16" black card with white hex overprint. The board is quite adequate, though uninteresting and flimsy, and with the latter in mind it is an idea to attach it securely to some stronger card.

Using Tactical Display Charts and the basic counters, players must record the many aspects of keeping their spaceships in top combat condition. All ships are controlled by the number of Power Units (points) available to them — supplied by the various engines, with each type of ship having varying types and numbers of warp and impulse engines.

There are three boardgame variations — Basic, Advanced and Expert, and basic rules and scenario for using this system for role-playing. The difference between these levels is more than sufficient to ensure that most players do more than just go through the motions of the lower two variants, the balance being such that one is not ready to progress until the previous ideas have been digested.

Full details of the Federation, Klingon, Romulan, Gorn and Orion Starships are given in Book Three, along with line drawings of each ship. However, either separate data sheets or recognition markings on the playing pieces would have been of immense help during initial play. Short paragraphs give brief outlines of the possible/probable tactics effected by each 'nation', but players sticking strictly to these will find the Federation an even tougher nut to crack than the rules already allow for. In a general one-on-one situation the starship specifications favour the Federation ships slightly; however, good battle planning can counter and thus negate this 'advantage'.

Damage is sustained when ships fire at each other or when a ship explodes in the vicinity of others. Combat 'hits' are decided by range, weapon type, and a d20 die roll. Hit location is important and therefore it is not left entirely to a random die-roll. There are six location charts for each Forward, Amidships, and Aft Shield (18 tables in total) and it is only once the correct table has been decided upon that the die-roll comes into play, when there are ten possible 'areas' that could have received the damage. As ships can fire and move, the determination of the correct 'hit' location takes a little discussion and determining, combined with tactics and fair play on behalf of all players involved. Hits on the Bridge can seriously affect decisions as the Officers on Duty can be shaken and taken out of play, in effect, in addition to the damage suffered by the control system.

Star Trek III is certainly good value for money, though I found it technically very difficult. Apart from the names — Enterprise, Klingons, Romulans, etc — I found it bore little resemblance to Star Trek the TV series, but then I must admit to having never been an addict 'Trekkie'. If you like good technical combat in which tactics are more effective than lucky dice, disregard the name and read it as the Starship Combat Game. If you are a *Star Trek* fan, but not technically minded, you will be disappointed.

Chris Baylis

MARVEL SUPER HEROES™: Project Wideawake

OK, X-Fans, this is the one you've been waiting for: a fairly complete list of all principal mutants in the Marvel universe, plus many of their acquaintances, described in terms of the **MARVEL SUPER HEROES™** game. MSH is all about playing Marvel characters, and if you have any interest at all in the X-Men and related groups then this product is essential.

Hmm, yes, well, enough of the hype. What happens if you're not mutant-mad? Anyone who has already seen the **Avengers Assembled** booklet will have a good idea of what **Project Wideawake** looks like: 32 pages of character descriptions, this time featuring the X-Men and New Mutants plus their regular adversaries including the Hellfire club, Brotherhood of Evil Mutants and Morlocks. There are also some plans of Professor Xavier's estate and mansion, although these are not really clear enough for any serious use without considerable work on the GM's part.

The coverage of Marvel mutant-kind is reasonably comprehensive. Quicksilver and Scarlet Witch have been left out as they were in the Avengers booklet; Beast was as well, of course, but they could hardly miss one of the original X-Men. Phoenix is in and, as might have been expected, is tough enough to take on everyone else in the booklet put together and win easily — the booklet sensibly recommends that she only enter games as an NPC. There are, however, some surprising omissions, including the Starjammers, Shi'Ar Imperial Guard and Alpha Flight. There are not many mutants in that lot, but they're all part of the X-Men circle. Another book, perhaps?

I have got a few gripes as well. One or two boobs seem to have slipped past the proof-readers; for example we are told that Magma regains health points each round as long as she is in contact with the ground, but we are not told how many points per round. However, if you want to run MSH as it is designed to be run, some things are essential, and this is one of them.

Final point: the booklet introduces a new rule to MSH. Supervillains now have negative popularity which is a measure of how easy they find it to cow hapless civilians. A nice idea.

Pete Tamlyn

TRAVELLER: Deneb Sector

Trailing the Spinward Marches lies the Deneb Sector, for many just another sector on the journey from the Imperial Core. Now Deneb Sector is open for adventure — vast fortunes are to be made and pleasure planets await the eager holidaymaker.

Deneb Sector is produced in the UK by Graham Staplehurst and David Hulks, and is sold in aid of the Save the Children Fund. The booklet is a great improvement on GDW's own Spinward Marches and Solomani Rim. Instead of just supplying pages and pages of subsector maps and statistics, it provides adventure ideas for many worlds and an extended campaign adventure.

The campaign adventure concerns the secrets held by mysterious alien artifacts — which, incidentally, bear more than a passing resemblance to Arthur C Clarke's enigmatic black monoliths. Following a series of clues, the players journey across four subsectors, visiting many exciting and strange places; among others, the University of Warwyck on Coventry and the primitive natives of Yeilten.

All the adventures require a fair amount of work to turn them into gaming sessions. In most cases, they consist of outlines and suggestions on running certain aspects. However, they are certainly more inspiring than the bland planetary data characteristics so often published. More information on how to run and flesh out the adventures would have greatly enhanced its usefulness. If only a few of the subsectors had been mapped, instead of all sixteen, this could have been possible. After all, sectors are *huge*, and there must be very few Travellers who ever visit every world.

For merchants struggling to make ends meet, Deneb Sector is very useful. In addition to standard trade classifications, most planets' major resources and industry are also listed. This is very useful for finding the suppliers of lucrative speculative trade goods and knowing that the mining world one parsec away has no use for your cargo of radioactives.

On the minus side, printing is not up to professional standards, and presentation could be improved in places. Finding your way around Deneb Sector is not easy. There is no listing of adjacent subsectors and no indication that the subsectors are mapped from right to left, instead of top to bottom as in the Spinward Marches. A map of the entire sector would have been very useful, as would showing which subsector was next to which — there's certainly space along the borders of the subsector maps for this. Listing a planet's Universal Planetary Profile along with its detailed description in the back of the book would also have saved a lot of flicking backwards and forwards.

Adventures on worlds with interesting backgrounds and cultures are the stuff of Traveller, and it's a pity that this was not developed more here. Still, Deneb Sector does not set out to be another Traveller Adventure and compared with similar sector listings, it is a great improvement. Even if you never run any adventures in Deneb Sector, this is well worth the money for the information provided. There are enough good ideas in here to enhance any Traveller campaign — and the money is going to a good cause.

Jim Bambra

INDIANA JONES: Judges Survival Pack

Fear not, intrepid explorers — help is at hand! For this accessory to the **ADVENTURES OF INDIANA JONES™** game contains all the things you've been waiting for since you bought the original game. Firstly, there are the ingenious Combat Computers which save the necessity of trying to perform mental arithmetic while thrilling to Indy's exploits. These tell you at a glance the effect of a given skill roll at a given modifier, although it must be said that the numbers are so small, they could be a bit difficult to read at times.

But this is not all! Much of the pack consists of cut-out-and-assemble Adventure Fold-Up™ figures of cars, a lorry, a motor bike, crates and other wonders. However simple the designers may claim it is to assemble these, I have my doubts. I suspect a large number of people are as unskilled as I am at putting together cardboard cut-out models, and these are by no means simple specimens. If you're good with your hands, though, they shouldn't present too many problems, and they certainly look quite impressive once assembled.

The pack does not contain only accessories — there are some rules. Summary tables have been provided for Vehicles, Weapons and Animals, with some additions to those found in the basic rules. Expansion rules are provided to liven up the ingenious Chase with chases round buildings, and new charts for City Street, and Countryside chases. But the crowning glory of the pack must be the Random Ruins tables, or, Indiana Jones Goes Dungeon-Bashing. Those familiar with the random dungeon generation rules provided in the **AD&D® Dungeon Master's Guide** will soon grasp the concept of this set of charts for providing daring explorers with exciting adventure locales. The charts follow a simple flow and could provide a judge with a basic scenario in a matter of minutes.

Finally, the pack corrects one of the major flaws of the original game by providing rules for generating your own characters. No longer will you be forced to play one of the characters dealing from the films, or bicker about who gets to play Indy. Now you can create your very own heroes. Unfortunately, the single page on the subject of character generation doesn't give you very much to work on, but with a bit of imagination the bare details could be fleshed out a bit.

Overall, however, this accessory pack doesn't provide anything that makes it particularly worth the price, and much of what it does contain should have been included in the original game anyway. But if you're a mad keen Indiana Jones player, you'll probably find it indispensible.

Paul Mason

Product Information

Cobra is an SPI® military history game, price £24.95; **Judges Survival Pack**, for the **ADVENTURES OF INDIANA JONES** game, costs £4.95; **Project Wideawake**, for the **MARVEL SUPER HEROES** game, costs £2.95; all from TSR UK Ltd, The Mill, Rathmore Rd, Cambridge CB1 4AD

Deneb Sector is for the **Traveller** game, price £2.75 direct from Deneb, 62 Church Rd, Harlesden, London NW10 9QD, or £2.95 from Games Workshop, Virgin Games and smaller independent shops. Proceeds to Save the Children.

Star Trek III boardgame is from Games Workshop, 27/29 Sunbeam Rd, London NW12 6JP. RRP £9.95

D&D® EXPERT: Blade of Vengeance

Erystelle of Dorneryll has returned to the Emerlas, the peaceful woodland of his youth, and is approaching home when the sight of flames and thick black smoke warns that all is not well. He rushes on, only to find his family slaughtered around the burning tree, some torn by huge claws that indicate a foe more awesome than the hobgoblins waiting there.

So begins Jim Bambra's **O2: Blade of Vengeance**, a UK-produced Expert module for a single player and DM. The player takes the role of Erystelle, a 7th level elf, in a search for revenge upon those responsible for his family's death. However, it soon transpires that this quest is more than just simple vengeance: the fate of the Emerlas and its inhabitants depend on the success of Erystelle. He must set off to find a way of recalling the great elven hero Galannor, only to find that he himself is destined to become as great a hero and that he must face this destiny alone.

The action of Blade of Vengeance is spread around the Emerlas in a number of set encounters, most of which provide some clue to help Erystelle on his quest. Without some major setback (eg Erystelle's death), the player should have little trouble in eventually puzzling out what is required; the clues are all relatively straightforward and enough aid is given by the other inhabitants of the Emerlas to ensure that Erystelle cannot go too far wrong. However, his enemies are not sitting quietly at home waiting for his arrival but are ever more frequently venturing into the forest to slaughter and pillage, a factor nicely reflected by the list of Events (encounters that happen at certain times rather than at certain locations) and by a variable wandering monster table. The climax of the scenario involves Erystelle sneaking into the midst of his enemies' camp and doing away with their leader. Actually this is where the scenario is at its weakest, lacking in the originality and atmosphere of the earlier part and almost a formality once Erystelle has got this far (the challenges are more of the dice rolling than the role-playing kind).

All in all, a splendid module, with good artwork and maps, clearly laid out and easy to use. The few new monsters are not gratuitous variations on an old theme but necessary to the scenario, and there is a well-developed and consistent atmosphere. The DM should endeavour to maintain this atmosphere (the innocent peace of the Emerlas increasingly threatened by the incursions from the north) and the related sense of urgency, if necessary ignoring the occasionally twee descriptions meant for the player and perhaps speeding up events if Erystelle is progressing too quickly. Blade of Vengeance should prove fascinating for the less experienced and pleasant enough even for the more demanding player.

Simon Forrest

D&D® EXPERT: Drums on Fire Mountain

The seaways southeast of Thyatis have never been particularly safe, but now it seems that the legends of green-skinned pirates and strange living fogs are true: shipping is being seriously disrupted and an expedition to discover why returned crippled, with just one prisoner. Rollo Bargmann has extracted enough information from the creature to point a party of brave adventurers in the right direction to eliminate the green reapers' new master. All he needs now...

DMs will love **X8: Drums on Fire Mountain** — it dumps the PCs on an island and lets them take it from there, while the DM is secure in the knowledge that whithersoever they wander something has been provided to throw at them. The PCs therefore don't have to be pushed towards one particular area — they'll find it themselves eventually and have plenty of fun on the way. When the party does at last stumble out of the jungle wilderness and into the 'dungeon' they find themselves in an exciting adventure with lots of interesting little twists and details.

The storyline revolves very much around the new beasties (those little green men and foggy 'ship-bane'). Apart from these, there's a wide range of monsters and situations, as befits the slightly more fantastical than many (but more believable than Castle Amber) setting. However, opportunities for role-playing seem limited: variations on 'attack on sight' appear only too often — a pity because players could miss out on a lot of the culture which is so painstakingly described.

The dungeon itself is laid out using the modular design — several small but action-packed areas with lots of room in between. Also, the third dimension of dungeon design (up and down) is used to good effect. These two features combine to keep up both the players' and the DM's interest. The area descriptions could do with beefing up in places, though.

A fair amount of brain as well as brawn is needed to get the most out of this adventure, as it can be difficult to unravel some of its complexities — players may be left with a very jumbled idea of events which, although not necessarily harmful to their enjoyment, could be disappointing for the DM.

There's enough in the module to last for at least two good gaming sessions, and it's rewarding in terms of material gain (loot is plentiful) and enjoyment. Worth a try.

Wendy J Rose

CONAN® RPG

With the recent influx of RPGs based on specific books, films and TV series, it is not all that surprising that we should eventually be presented with the **CONAN® RPG**. Along with the trend for this type of RPG has also come the unfortunate tendency for such games to be written in very simple English. CONAN RPG is no exception, and although it can be argued that the style encourages younger players and enables them to grasp the concept of the game more easily, one cannot help but feel that one is being talked down to by the authors.

This boxed RPG contains a 36-page rule book; a 16-page reference guide; a useful reference sheet with resolution table, equipment lists, etc; three character folios — could have been four but one has been thoughtfully filled in with Conan's statistics; a 48-page booklet describing The World of Hyboria — background information, complete with very irritating 'handwritten' margin notes, pencil drawings, smudges and artificial coffee stains; a full colour poster-style map of Hyboria; and, would you believe, a white wax crayon!

In the main, the rules are kept as simple as possible — as illustrated by the fact that the most situations, combat or otherwise, are resolved using just one table.

Character generation is short and sweet. Instead of the more usual primary requisite generation followed by choice of skills and professions, players jump straight into the latter stage. They must choose skills or 'talents' from each of six 'talent pools' — prowess, fighting, endurance, knowledge, perception and insight. The player has an initial 35 points to spend, which may be increased by 5 if a weakness such as 'fear of heights' or 'weakness for men' is accepted. Not more than 5 points may be spent on any talent, and the character must have at least one talent from each talent pool.

Once talents have been chosen, a 'general talent' score is obtained by taking the sum of each talent pool in turn, dividing by 10 and rounding down. These general talent scores are perhaps the nearest equivalent to the PRs of other RPGs. Whenever a character wishes to use a talent, the resolution table is cross-indexed with a d100 roll to determine success or failure. A player may attempt an action in which the character is unskilled; in this case the general talent score is used.

Continuing the 'simplicity is best' approach, we next come to the combat system. The ubiquitous resolution table is used to determine the results of combat, not only giving success or failure of any attempt to strike but also the amount of damage. A 'combat differential' is obtained, and cross-indexed with a d100 on the resolution table to give a result — a miss or 1-4 points of damage. Damage is modified by weapon and strength bonuses, and some points may be stopped by armour. The attacker must specify the aiming point, but since this only has any real effect when a 'specific wound' occurs and does not carry any bonuses or penalties, the quick-witted will soon realise it makes sense to aim only for unarmoured areas of opponents where possible. Damage itself is removed from a single characteristic which is one of the endurance talents.

No system is without weaknesses; Conan RPG's major weakness is its magic system. Although magic is theoretically open to anyone, it has been made so time-consuming and difficult to obtain as to be attractive to only the most foolhardy of characters. For instance, 'mind control' magic talent takes a total of six months' study. It does not end there, however; once a magic talent is learnt, the character does not gain the associated spells automatically but must research them by travelling, reading tomes and collecting components. What exactly is needed for each spell is not stated, nor are the full effects explained in detail; it is almost as if by making magic difficult to pursue the authors are hoping no-one will want to. The only interesting concept is 'obsession' which is set at 1 when a character obtains a magic talent and increases each time another magic item is gained or used. Each time a character is faced with the temptation to obtain more magic, the player has to check on the resolution table against obsession. If unsuccessful, the character must use all possible means to try and obtain the magic item.

Advancement is achieved by the awarding of talent points (up to 10 per adventure) by the GM, who may also award fame points which affect the character's standing in the community, and luck points which may be expended by players to reduce damage or to allow a re-roll of the dice. The latter are kept secretly by the GM.

In conclusion, this game has some interesting concepts but is lacking in certain respects, notably the magic system and the slant towards the younger gamer. I would welcome enlightenment on one subject: what is the white wax crayon for?? Answers on a postcard to ...

Mike Dean

Product Information

O2: Blade of Vengeance and **X8: Drums on Fire Mountain** are adventures for the **D&D Expert Set**, £4.95 each; **The Book of Marvelous Magic**, suitable for use with the **D&D** and **AD&D** games, costs £4.95;**CONAN RPG** is a new game, price £9.95

All these products are from TSR. If you can't get them at your local hobby shop, write to TSR UK Ltd at The Mill, Rathmore Road, Cambridge CB1 4AD for a mail order form.

D&D®: The Book of Marvelous Magic

'Wow,' I thought to myself, 'what a useful thing to have around. The ultimate source-book on magic items for D&D.' It's another step in the Basic upgrade series, enabling all players of that game to have lists of items comparable to those for the Advanced game. If you play the AD&D® game, do not worry: the items are compatible with your system also. These items have clearly been created to grab the intelligent end of the market, since users are required to work out experience awards and sale prices themselves! A step on the road to making D&D DMs autonomous...

The items in this book basically fall into three categories. There are the sensible ones, the bad-play compensatory ones, and the silly ones. A good example of the first is the **Armchair of Travel**, which transports the seated person to the desired location, becoming ethereal on the journey to avoid being stopped. This is something which any sane mage with spare time might create, since it saves all that tiring spell-casting. An example of the second is the **Cue Ball**: whenever the user is in doubt about a decision of any kind, the cue ball can offer its opinion, formulated by use of ESP on the user's mind. It's obvious that no mage would waste time on such an item. An example of the third is the **Handkerchief of Flirting**: 'When this simple silken scarf is dropped within 30 feet of any creature of the opposite sex and the command word spoken, the chosen victim is enamoured of the user... Creatures of dubious gender are not affected.' This sort of item makes me question the sanity of the mage who created it.

Further intriguing items follow: wonder how the party find out what all these items are? The **libram of identification** is here, to tell all. How the party identifies the libram of identification is unclear. How about the **self-lighting pipe**, which, if used while the bowl is empty, sends out a cone of magical flame 10 feet long? James Bond eat your heart out.

One of the problems of Basic-type games is that magic items occur too frequently, much more often than in the fiction from which they are drawn. It shouldn't be necessary to produce this book: DMs should be capable of creating what few items are needed to suit the scenarios. However, there will be people out there who disagree, and think the world would be boring without magic items at every street corner, and if that is what you are after, then this book is probably for you. Some items will be useful, some will add humour to the campaign, and some will enable you to justify the relaxation of the rules which you've probably been employing for years. But you will probably never use the vast majority of items, and that's what makes me wonder if you wouldn't be better off creating your own.

Jez Keen

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Fantasy Media

*Neil Gaiman, author of **IMAGINE** short stories **Featherquest** and **How to Sell the Ponti Bridge**, and co-author of **Ghastly Beyond Belief**, reviews the latest additions to the fantasy/SF media.*

Following last month's famine, we have a high calory feast on our hands this month, both for books and films. Take a deep breath, because we're going to be covering an awful lot very fast. Starting with a film set in Oz. That's right, it's the **RETURN TO OZ** (Disney) — six months after young Dorothy was blown to Oz by a tornado, she's in deep trouble at home. Nobody believes her stories, she can't sleep and evil Dr Worley and Nurse Wilson are planning to subject her to an early form of ECT. And once she gets back to Oz, things are no better — the yellow brick road is destroyed, the people of the Emerald City turned to stone. Aided by a robot named Tik Tok and a pumpkin-headed thing named Jack Pumpkinhead, not to mention a flying Sofa contraption, she sets out to thwart the wicked, many-headed witch Mombi, the evil, almost omnipotent Nome King, and the bizarre Wheelers. Terrifying and visionary, funny and exciting, Return to Oz is one of the very best fantasy films I've ever seen.

Dorothy discovers that the Tin Man has been turned to stone.
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For those with more perverse tastes there is **SHE** (Avatar, 18) — ostensibly based on H Rider Haggard's wonderful book, although the only similarity I could spot is that both of the SHE's in question are female. Fighting fantasy after the Bomb: Tom and Dick are hunting for Tom's sister, Hari (imaginative names, huh folks?); aided by SHE (Sandahl Bergman, who played Valeria in the first Conan thing) they cross the yellow forest of death, fight mutants, escape from the priests of Godin, and battle the Monty-pythonesque Xenon before going up against the City of the Norks. Just bad enough to be very funny for those willing to ignore the fact that the plot, the acting and the direction are of **Plan Nine From Outer Space** standard. A must for anyone who likes throwing popcorn at the screen.

Stephen King's **CAT'S EYE** (Columbia EMI Warner, 15) is familiar territory for anyone who's read the **Night Shift** anthology; three stories connected by a cat. Quitters Inc, about a man who'll give up smoking even if it kills him. And it might, since a philanthropic branch of the mafia are in on the act. The Ledge, about a bet, and a queasy one if you're scared of heights. And the final story, all about a little girl (Drew Barrymore) who thinks that a wicked troll lives in her wall. Her mother believes that cats steal children's breath while they sleep, and kill the kids. Which wouldn't be so bad, but the cat in question is the only thing protecting the girl from the troll. Funny, scary, and one of the best King movies so far.

NIGHT OF THE COMET (Entertainment, 15) is one of the most amusing, witty, imaginative, and thought-provoking films I've seen that was made with no budget and is also cheap exploitation (you got all that?). It's the end of the world; only attractive Regina and her jailbait sister Samantha are left alive when a passing comet turns everyone to sand. That's not quite true — there are also a bunch of zombies, some underground scientists, a boyfriend and maybe some others. Thank heavens the girls' father taught them everything there is to know about machine guns and martial arts, otherwise they'd hardly have stood a chance.

There's also **FLETCH** (UIP, 15) — not fantasy, but a very enjoyable detective comedy starring Chevy Chase as an undercover reporter who gets mixed up in a murder plot. Not as good as the Greg Mcdonald book it's based on.

Oh yeah, books. Well, we've got **GILGAMESH THE KING** (Gollancz, £9.95), Robert Silverberg's recreation of the oldest story ever told. Gilgamesh is a giant, a fighting man, and King of ancient Uruk over five thousand years ago, when Man was closer to the Gods than He is today. A fascinating look at a long-gone culture, with a magnificent Jim Burns cover. Iain Bank's **THE WASP FACTORY** (Futura, £1.95) will delight horror fans with its mixture of black humour and horrible, imaginative, beautiful deaths. Also for all you Nasty fans, Stephen King has a new story collection, **SKELETON CREW** (MacDonald, £9.95), 500 pages of gorious goodies, and the magnificent Clive Barker brings us **BOOKS OF BLOOD 4, 5** and **6** (Sphere, £1.50 each). For those of you who wonder how far it is possible for an author to go, you need look no further, as hands attempt to rule the world, frogs succeed (sort of), and there's something unpleasant behind every door. There's also Ramsey Campbell's **INCARNATE** (Granada, £2.50) and James Herbert's **DOMAIN** (NEL, £2.50). For value for money I have to recommend L Ron Hubbard's massive **BATTLEFIELD EARTH** — over 1000 pages of thrills, spills, vicious aliens, noble humans. Is mankind an endangered species? Will handsome and heroic Jonny Goodboy Tyler win Earth back from the nine-foot-high Psychlos? A tribute to the days of Pulp, I found it un-put-downable. And all for only £2.95 (New Era). Roger Zelazny has **THE DREAM MASTER** and **THIS IMMORTAL** (Methuen, both £1.95) out — vintage stuff. And there's only just room to recommend Walter Tevis' **THE STEPS OF THE SUN** (Corgi, £2.95) — a novel about impotence, space travel and a futuristic energy crisis, and to mention Barbara Hambly's **THE TIME OF THE DARK** (Book One, we are informed, in the chilling Darwath trilogy — Unicorn, £2.50) a must for those of you who like trilogies with stupid titles. Aaaghh — I'm slipping off the page! Next month things are back to normal with **The Return of Colin Greenland**. Uh, thank you for having me. Until next time...

Neil Gaiman

letters.... letters.... letters....

letters.... letters.... letters....

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Introducing THE FANSCENE

Welcome to **The FanScene**, our new hobby section. We decided it was time to change the format and content of the fan coverage, to get more people involved. We have a lot of exciting, amusing, and hopefully entertaining ideas for what to include, but what we really need is some response from you, yes YOU, the reader! You may feel daunted, unsure of whether your work is polished enough — don't feel that way about The FanScene; we want contributions from everybody, and will happily tidy up your work for you.

The major area you can contribute to is **Soapbox**, which exists as a forum for *anyone* who wants to put forward a view about the games hobby, industry, or games themselves. Role-players seem a fairly vocal lot, so let's hear from you! From October, The FanScene will also have its own **Letters** page, which is a space for responses to Soapbox, and debates on hobby matters — if you don't feel up to writing a full-length article, just write a letter.

Anyway, enjoy this first instalment, and write and let us know what you think of it. Are there any other features you would like to see, area you want covered? The address for letters, contributions and anniversary cards (yes, I've been writing the fanzine reviews for a whole year now!) is The FanScene, 97 Fleet Rd, Cove, Farnborough, Hants. Or write c/o IMAGINE magazine. I expect to hear from you.

Mike Lewis

SOAPBOX

This month's contributor: PETE TAMLYN

Why Fanzines?

Many of you must wonder why so much space is given to discussion of fanzines. After all, while it is difficult to get an accurate figure as to how many people read games fanzines, most estimates seem to settle at around the 1000 mark, making them a fairly small percentage of IMAGINE™ magazine's total readership. Fanzine readers (and editors in particular) are, of course, a fairly vocal minority, but there are other good reasons for devoting space to them in a professional magazine. As one of the people who lobbied for this sort of material when the magazine first started, I think it only fair that I present my reasons to the readership as a whole, rather than merely continuing to pester Paul and Uncle Don.

Many reasons have been advanced as to why fanzine coverage is important. There are, of course, some fanzine editors who believe that the publicity is theirs by right, but then there are silly people in all walks of life. More persuasive are the arguments that fanzines provide a useful outlet for the more innovative and obscure sides of rolegaming which would not normally warrant professional coverage, and that fanzines provide a useful training ground for future games publishers.

Evidence can easily be found to support both of these propositions. Paul Mason's **Imazine** is a fount of fascinating discussion which IMAGINE and **White Dwarf** magazines would probably regard as too heavy for general consumption; **Dagon** and **Superhero UK** provide extensive coverage of games which get much less attention in professional magazines. As far as the training ground argument goes, Marc Gascoigne and Ian Marsh are merely the latest names in a long list of fanzine editors who have taken jobs with games companies. Indeed, Don Turnbull started the first-ever British games fanzine.

In my view, these are side issues resulting from the main function of fanzines, that being to provide a means of creating and sustaining an active hobby independent of the needs and desires of professional games companies.

In order to explain what I mean by this, I would like to take a look at a couple of other gaming activities, one of which has got such a hobby and one which has not. When the **D&D®** game was first becoming well known in this country there was another games craze sweeping all before it: **Space Invaders**. Who plays video games now? It is becoming hard to find a pub with a machine, whereas three years back hardly a pub was without one. This is something of an unfair comparison in that a video game does not have the imaginative input of rolegaming and this makes it more difficult for any sort of fan following to form. Nevertheless there are people who believe that RPGs are 'just another schoolboy fad' and that they will be completely forgotten in ten years.

Wargaming is at completely the other end of the spectrum. While the board wargamers have had the likes of Avalon Hill and SPI to back them up, figure wargaming has survived quite happily with hardly any input from commercial organisations. A fair few books have been published, and some small companies make a respectable living out of producing rules and figures, but the activity has never managed to spawn an organisation the size of TSR. The reason that it has survived is that wargamers have made their own entertainment. When they want a battle to fight they either research one from history books or make one up, rather than buying a commercially produced scenario. They keep in contact through clubs and amateur newsletters. Although magazines covering the field have come and gone, they tend to be produced by professional magazine publishers rather than games companies seeing a vehicle through which to promote their products, as is the case with IMAGINE and White Dwarf magazines.

Like wargaming, rolegaming has a following of committed amateurs. Fanzines provide them with a channel of communication and a means of advertising themselves, thereby sustaining their interest and swelling their numbers.

Just a minute, though; if fanzines are providing a means whereby rolegamers can carry on their hobby independently of games companies, why should IMAGINE magazine give them space? Surely it is in TSR's interests to have its customers dependent on its services? From a short term point of view this may be correct — it is far better for sales figures if everyone buys scenarios rather than writing their own. However, as soon as you look at the long-term implications of such a policy, it begins to look considerably less rosy. Games, like most other products these days, are subject to the whims of fashion. I haven't seen anyone doing a **Rubik's Cube** for ages, and in two years' time no-one will play **Trivial Pursuit**. Only a real classic like **Monopoly** can survive through the years. If rolegaming really is just a schoolboy fad that will soon have run its course, then the future for TSR and its competitors looks fairly bleak. Perhaps this is why many games companies have started to diversify their interests.

Nevertheless there is some hope on the horizon. Most of the people who currently buy rolegaming products are of school or college age, or at least were that age when they started. If all those people can be persuaded to continue playing rolegames, and young people persuaded to take up the pastime, then the industry is guaranteed an expanding market for years to come. So how do you produce this miracle? One way is to use the mechanisms of fashion; if you continue to produce new products, people will continue to buy them. But this assumes that the fashion itself remains fashionable. Clothing manages it because some form of clothing is a necessity; popular music succeeds by completely changing style every ten years. Could rolegaming survive as a fashion alone? I doubt it. An alternative solution, and in my view the only one that will prove effective, is for games companies to get their customers to do the work for them. Enthusiastic amateurs can provide just as much valuable publicity as advertising campaigns, and they are a darn sight cheaper. By encouraging fanzines and through them a keen, active amateur hobby, games companies are, I believe, providing insurance for their own survival.

By this time I may have got you thinking that fanzines are only there to make more money for games companies. Not so; they provide means whereby innovation and minority tastes can be encouraged, safe from the harsh pressures of economic reality. Rolegaming is a very creative pursuit and therefore one which lends itself naturally to producing a thriving amateur hobby.

It may take a little time to find a fanzine that suits your particular style but I am sure that almost anyone can get more out of their rolegaming by becoming more involved in the hobby. If this also helps the commercial side of the pastime to survive, then so much the better because it will mean a greater chance of good quality products and lots of useful publicity. Despite their obvious sources of disagreement, the amateur and professional sides of rolegaming need each other. They need to recognise that fact and build on it.

ZINE ZONE

STAR ZINE

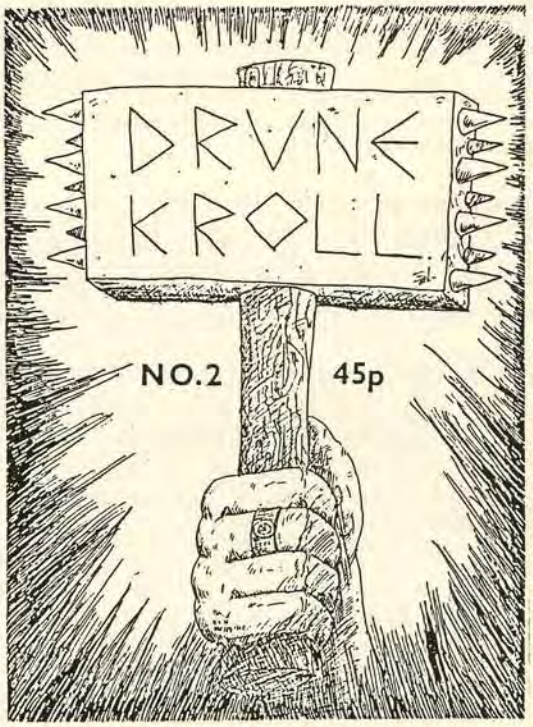
What better way could there be to start off the new format fanzine reviews than by featuring **HOPSCOTCH**, which has just reached its fiftieth issue. Many congratulations to Alan Parr for this publishing feat! Hopscotch is an exceptional fanzine, with a policy of featuring new and unusual postal games. This policy made it especially stand out in 1980 when Alan started the zine with the express purpose of trying out new games and ideas, at a time when every other postal games zine heavily featured **Diplomacy** — regarded by many as the only true postal game. The scepticism of others didn't deter Alan, and Hopscotch has been published regularly ever since, never once being late.

Alan doesn't only convert normal boardgames to postal play, but runs original games, the most famous being **United**, the football management game of his own invention which is run in a vast number of fanzines all over Europe as well as the UK. There is even a computerised version of the game available (*see review, #22*). Other games include **White Box** (a variant on **Black Box**), **The Pentomino Game, Regatta, Entropy** (about Thermodynamics!), **Circus Maximus**, and so on. In fact, a lot of the games which are accepted as standard postal games for a fanzine to offer were first run in Hopscotch.

Games aren't the only feature, of course, even if they are the chief reason for the zine existing. Alan always writes several pages of chat about the hobby and what's happened to him since the last issue, as well as featuring several pages of letters on games and life in general. The chat in Hopscotch may not be polished, flowing prose, but it is entertaining, and funny — conveying the friendly feeling that the zine has towards its readers. Like most fanzine editors, Alan Parr enjoys what he is doing and wants his readers to enjoy it too.

Hopscotch nowadays seems to have very few spare places in its games for any newcomers, but Alan compensates for this by publishing details of games available in other zines, so Hopscotch can be an invaluable guide to finding a game elsewhere, as well as being a very enjoyable zine itself. Issue 50 comes with a 20-page supplement detailing the complete history of Hopscotch, written in Alan's light and entertaining style. Personally, I look forward to the next fifty issues.

While the older fanzines are reaching important issue numbers, new fanzines continue to appear, especially in the FRP field. **HOCUS POCUS** is a new Amateur Press Association (APA) fanzine, aimed at filling the gap left by **Trollcrusher**, and the other now defunct APAs. An APA fanzine consists of articles which are printed as they are submitted; that is to say, the editor of the zine puts together the magazine from already typed submissions, gets it printed and then distributes it. The first issue of Hocus Pocus has contributions from a few well-known fans, but the zine is really only just finding its feet, so it could be a good time for you to contribute to it.



BORIS is a rather strange new zine from the fevered minds of Chris Preist and Dave Murray. I'm not quite sure what to make of a zine which offers articles on Beauty and Haircare in the **AD&D**™ game and an interview with Paul Mason, along with more sensible articles on system free gaming, and a system free scenario. The style is light and chatty — perhaps not everyone's cup of tea, but I really enjoyed it!

THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES suffers from very poor production (which the editors freely admit), but it offers useful articles on AD&D and **RuneQuest**, including a new character class, the Torturer — which also appears in **SWORD OF SYLVIAN** 1 as an NPC. This zine is nicely laid out, but is let down by short, skimpy articles, and an excess of average quality fiction. It also includes rather dubious rules for Seduction in the **D&D**® game!

IVORY TOWER 2 still has hand-written contents throughout (although Geoff has bought a typewriter now!) but this doesn't stop it from carrying a lot of very useful articles for **Golden Heroes, Traveller** and RuneQuest and a detailed scenario for **MERP**. The latter has the unusual feature of illustrating some of the locations with photographs — an excellent idea! **THE BOOKLET OF MANY THINGS** issue 2 is very similar to the first one. There is a useful piece on magic, but the zine is spoilt (for me at least) by the frantic attempts of the editors to be funny all the time, something which just doesn't come off. **THE ROLE-PLAYING KARMA SUTRA** 2 has rather sparse contents (including a terrible music column), but does include rather amazing sets of rules for an A-Team game, and arm-wrestling in the AD&D game.

I am tempted not to review **STARQUESTER** 2 at all, as one of its pages carries a death-threat to me if I don't! However, it would be a shame not to mention it as it is really very good. Production is better, most of the columns have gone, replaced with material such as Werewolves in FRP, some new creatures for RuneQuest, Cthulhu in 1985 (including a new Zine Editor class), plus scenarios for D&D, RQ and **Laserburn**. A lot of good material and excellent value for money. **DRUNE KROLL** 2 has a large AD&D scenario for medium level characters set on the Isle of Death (a pleasant sounding place!), plenty of chat, and postal games including Brookside the RPG!

CHAOS LORD is still fairly poor. It carries material for the AD&D game, and a rather powerful addition for **Call of Cthulhu** called Cthulhu Busters! After a few poor issues, **OBSCURITY INC** 5 is back on form with an excellent balance between serious articles (converting RQ3 to **Glorantha**, Religion in CoC), chat and silliness — the latter represented by Wombles in RuneQuest! Very strongly recommended. And finally, **TEMPESTUOUS ORIFICE** has put out issue 7 after a 9-month gap since issue 6; perhaps they should change it to TO Annual? A shame that it is so infrequent, as it is an excellent FRP fanzine, with a very high standard of content.

Mike Lewis

Contact addresses for these and other fanzines received this month are listed overleaf.

Brian Creese invites you to

Long ago, or so it seems, I told you how some keen games players thought up the idea of playing the boardgame **Diplomacy** by post. The system was easy; an extra player was invented, the GM to whom all players sent their orders for movement. When the appointed hour arrived, this GM would look at all the orders, work out what had happened, and write to the players with the results. And in this way did Uncle Don first become a publisher...

Of course, it was all very simple then; a sheet of purple, alcohol-smelling banda-duplicated game report, but quickly enough these 'zines' were running not only lots of games, but carrying articles on 'opening theory' and lettercolumns about something called 'the hobby', and generally appearing to be more sophisticated. The people who did these things had got the ideas from Science Fiction fandom, and simply carried them over into their new hobby.

And if the Diplomacy hobby was created from the world of SF, then the FRP hobby came from Diplomacy's, for almost all the styles and approaches used in FRP zines have been current in postal gaming circles for a long while. And, indeed, more and more FRP zines are turning to postal games to help give them a shape and a deadline, a reason for appearing at least vaguely on time. And while many of these offer some of the more esoteric games, **Postal Snowball Fighting**, or **Judge Dredd**, most still include a token game of Diplomacy, as a tribute to their history.

In other words, if you want to play a game by post, you really should have a go at Diplomacy, simply because the general rules and mores of this hobby have grown up around its founding game. What is more, it is a tremendously *easy* game to play. All you need is a map of the board, and some pins to represent the different countries' units. A set of rules, a subscription to a zine and a new pad of writing paper, and you are away.

By now you all know how to play the game, I

ZINE ARTS

The **Zine Arts** section of The FanScene is designed to give some exposure to the various artists working within fanzines, many of whom produce excellent work, but who seldom get the recognition or exposure they deserve. It should also serve to show the high standard of fanzine art to those of you who haven't investigated fanzines yet.

Our first fan-artist is **HUDSON SHAW**. Hudson's work first began appearing in FRP fanzines in **DoomBook of Chaos,** and early **DragonLords**. Since then, his work has appeared in nearly every FRP fanzine around! He is well-known for his single panel cartoons, and his preference for ducks! His work is heavily influenced by cartoons, and the late Vaughan Bode.

GAME COMPANY

Clubs

BISHOP AUCKLAND, Durham: Anthony Stockton, 15, keen player of **AD&D, D&D** and **Middle Earth** rpgs, is looking for mature players and clubs in his area. 16 Clarence Gdns, Bishop Auckland, DL14 7RB

DURHAM: Light Infantrymen Wargames Group is looking for more members: board games, 15 and 25mm figure gaming, **AD&D** game, etc. Every Tuesday, 7-9.30pm, at the local Community Centre. Ring Graeme Dowdell on Spennymoor 815283 after 7pm, or David Ostridge on Durham 64707 after 6pm any night except Wednesday. Minimum age 14

KENTISH TOWN, London: A 12-year-old boy is looking for a club in North London. Please write c/o Club Ref 291, IMAGINE magazine.

MAIDENHEAD, Berks: 17-year-old Steven Williams is experienced in a wide range of games and wants to know of any wargaming groups in his vicinity. 126 Alwyn Road, Maidenhead SL6 5EW.

SUNDERLAND: Two gamers are thinking of starting a club: phone Steve on Sunderland 43777 after 6.30pm on weekdays if you are interested.

WEYMOUTH, Dorset: Alan Mead, age 11, would like help setting up his first **D&D®** game. If you can offer assistance, write to him at 28 Overlands Rd, Wyke Regis, Weymouth, Dorset DT4 9HS.

YORK: Anyone interested in joining an FRP club in New Earswick? **AD&D, Traveller, CoC, RuneQuest, Middle Earth**. Wednesday night 7-10pm. Age 13+, beginners welcome. Ring Ian on 768950

Events

CAMCON, primarily a Science Fiction con, will offer facilities for RPGers, and possibly a panel discussion. GoH John Christopher. 13-15 September, New Hall College, Cambridge. Details from Neil Taylor, c/o Perspective Design, 9 Pembroke St, Cambridge

Also on 13-15 September, **CONQUEST** at Queens Hotel, Hastings. This is a general games con. Write to John Marsden, 17 Church Rd, St Leonards, Hastings TN37 6EF for further details.

GAMES DAY will be at the Royal Horticultural Hall, London, as usual: 28-29 September.

ARTICON will be at Hatfield Poly, 4-6 October. GoH Bryan Talbot. Competition dungeon, films, talks, games, live bands, stalls. Write to Jaine Fennell, 278 Chapman Hall, Bishops Rise, Hatfield, Herts.

MIDCON — the Star Trek version — will be on October 11-13 at Leicester International Hotel. Seemingly this is a special media event; details from Terry Elson, 8 Ennerdale Cl, Oadby, Leicester.

NOVACON will be at the De Vere Hotel, Coventry, November 1-3, with guests Dave Langford and James White. Details from 86 Bearwood Farm Road, Wylde Green, Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham B72 1AG.

KOANCON may take place on August Bank Holiday *1986* at Warwick University — but the organisers will not proceed unless there is evidence of interest from you! Write to Trevor Mendham, 53 Towncourt Crescent, Petts Wood, Kent, or Alex Zbyslaw, 197 Herbert Ave, Poole, Dorset.

play DIPLOMACY

expect. You don't? Seven players represent the principal powers of Europe at the turn of the century. Each is roughly balanced with armies and fleets. Movement is childishly simple; you can move one space at a time unless another unit is in the space you are trying to get to. In this case you can 'gang up', with two pieces bettering one, three two, and so on. The object is simply to dominate over half the board. The subtlety is that by yourself you can never win; you need friends who will help and support you. But if you keep those friends you will never grow to be the biggest. The tactics are easy, the game is won and lost in the negotiations which occupy (in the postal version) the three or four weeks between moves. You can promise what you like; only the GM knows what your orders *really* are, at least until they are published!

So why don't you try a game yourself? All it takes is a couple of quid to an editor and you are away. A bit worried about the opposition, perhaps? Think they may all be experts? Well, never fear. IMAGINE magazine is sponsoring a game of Postal Diplomacy, open only to readers who have not played Diplomacy by post before, to be held in my own zine **NMR!**

What do we need from you? Well, most of all, commitment. A decent game will last anything between two and three years, and to succeed you must never miss a deadline or forget to send in your orders. A subscription of £2 will get you started with a few issues. Also, we would like to follow the game in The FanScene, so as GM I will be reporting on the progress of the game, and inviting comments from you on how you are enjoying it.

So that is the idea. Join a game of Postal Diplomacy. If you are interested, prepared to comment on the game, and think you can send in orders regularly for a couple of years, then write to me at 256 Canbury Park Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 6LG, for one of the available places.

Brian Creese

ILLUSIONIST SPELLS

FIRST LEVEL

Gaze Reflection: The creature which has its gaze reflected does, of course, get a saving throw against the effects of its own gaze.

SECOND LEVEL

Detect Magic: Oddly the DMG states that this spell functions as per the clerical version of the spell, and 'NOT the magic user spell'. Thus illusionists do not have any chance of knowing the nature of the detected magic, only its intensity.

THIRD LEVEL

Rope Trick: See comments on the second level magic-user spell of the same name.

FOURTH LEVEL

Improved Invisibility: PCs should be aware that this is less easily detected by monsters with an innate ability to detect invisibility as a function of hit dice and intelligence than an ordinary invisibility spell. They might not know by how much; details are given on p47 of the DMG.

Phantasmal Killer: This spell is powerless against an unconscious creature, and if a creature affected by the spell is rendered unconscious, the spell can do no more harm.

SIXTH LEVEL

Conjure Animals: See comments on the sixth level clerical spell of the same name.

Demi-Shadow Magic: There is a bizarre anomaly here with respect to the wall spells; victims can take more damage from making their saving throws than if they fail them. An illusionist has to be 12th level to have memorised a sixth level spell; he casts a demi-shadow wall of ice in the air above a party. Those who fail their saving throws get 3-30 (average 16.5) points of damage and those who make their saving throws get 12d4 damage (average 30 points). This is ludicrous, and there is a logical unofficial change. Since characters failing a saving throw against, say, a demi-shadow fireball takes 3.5 points of damage (on average) per level of the illusionist, and those who make their saving throw take 2 points of damage per level of the illusionist (this is specified in the PH), with respect to the wall spells one could rule that damage taken by those making a saving throw is $^4/_7$ of that which would be taken by those failing (a messy fraction, but things are kept consistent). This problem obviously requires an official rule revision, but the suggestion here makes the effects of this spell uniform across all applications causing physical damage.

That covers the major changes in the DMG for the MU and Illusionist spells; Clerical and Druid spells will be detailed next month. If DMs and players are discussing these matters in the light of the 'changes', they might also review the whole question of just what spell casting characters are taught when they learn the spells for the first time, and what they have to gather from experience. It is clear that the DMG is not just a DM's reference tool, but that it contains some information that PCs should know as a matter of course. This situation is likely to be all the more confused when **Unearthed Arcana** is released in the next few weeks, containing information aimed at both players and DMs. It is far better to have talked the matter through before the first time the DM turns to a player and says "You do realise that won't work in these circumstances...."

Carl Sargent and the DC gang; Jim Bambra, Mike Brunton, Phil Gallagher and Graeme Morris

ZINE ZONE

Thanks for all the fanzines listed below.

If you write to any fanzines, it's a good idea to enclose a stamped self-addressed envelope for the reply.

BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY, Malcolm Smith, Bus 26, Astridplein 31-32, Antwerpe 2000, Belgium (40p); **BOOKLET OF MANY THINGS**, Stephen Gilbert, 15 Cross Lane, Dronfield, Sheffield S18 6SH (50p); **BORIS**, Chris Preist, 55 Exwick Hill, Exeter, Devon EX4 2AW (40p); **BSFA**, Sandy Brown, 18 Gordon Terrace, Blantyre, Lanarkshire G72 9NA (£7 per year); **CHAOS LORD**, Anthony Walker, 4 Upper Guakroge, Sowerby NE Rd, Sowerby Bridge, Halifax (50p); **CUT & THRUST**, Derek Wilson, 321 Headley Road East, Woodley, Reading, Berks RG5 4SE (55p); **DAGON**, Carl Ford, 11 Warwick Rd, Twickenham, Middlesex TW2 6SW (85p); **DEMON'S DRAWL**, Jeremy Nuttall, 49 Longdown Rd, Congleton, Cheshire CW12 4QH (55p); **DRUNE KROLL**, Justin Horrell, Sunny Bank, Stouthall Garage, Reynoldston, Swansea SA3 1AN (45p); **HOCUS POCUS**, Paul Holman, 296 Harrow View, Harrow, Middx HA2 6QQ (50p); **HOPSCOTCH**, Alan Parr, 6 Longfield Gardens, Tring, Herts (55p); **IVORY TOWER**, Geoffrey Dean, 61 Swaledale Ave, Darlington, Co Durham DL3 9AR (55p); **LANKHMAR STAR DAILY**, Robert Nott, Flat 3, 6 Bradburne Rd, Bournemouth, Dorset (60p); **MAD POLICY**, Richard Walkerdine, 144 Stoughton Rd, Guildford, Surrey GU2 6PG (40p); **MARTIAN CHRONICLES**, Michael Wall, 6 Government House Rd, Water End, Clifton, York (55p); **MOUSE POLICE**, Rob Wilson, Penryn, 4 Campion Rd, Leamington Spa, Warks CV32 5XQ (40p); **OBSCURITY INC**, Tony Keen, Kitchener House, 6 Gordon Tce, Edinburgh EH16 5QH (45p); **PROTOPLASM**, Ivan O'Brien, 20 Victoria Rd, Rathgar, Dublin 6 (50p); **ROLEPLAYING KARMA SUTRA**, Dave Webster, 455 Loughborough Rd, Birstall, Leicester LE4 4BH (35p); **SEWARS**, Chris Baylis, 12 The Fryth, Basildon, Essex SS14 3PN (80p); **SPAWN OF CHAOS**, Mark Pitman, 42 Heath Way, Blofield Corner, Norwich, Norfolk NR13 4RS (40p); **SPREADSHEET**: Jez Keen, 1 Glenfield Rd, Stockport SK4 2QP (?); **STARQUESTER**, Richard Mumford, 4 Alderson Square, Harrogate, N Yorks HG2 8AX (60p); **SWORD OF SYLVIAN**, 44 Oakland Drive, Upton, Wirral, Merseyside L49 6JL (60p); **TEMPESTUOUS ORIFICE**, Patrick Fama, 15 York Close, Morden, Surrey SM4 5HW (60p); **VIENNA**, Richard Egan, 64 Rookery Rd, Knowle, Bristol BS4 2DT (40p)

Next Issue

THE END OF THE WORLD!

The Viking Special Issue.
All you need to know to set your campaign in the lands and times of the Norse-men:
Vikings as Player Characters; Rune Magic; Lore, Lay & Legend; Icelanders; Norse Planes

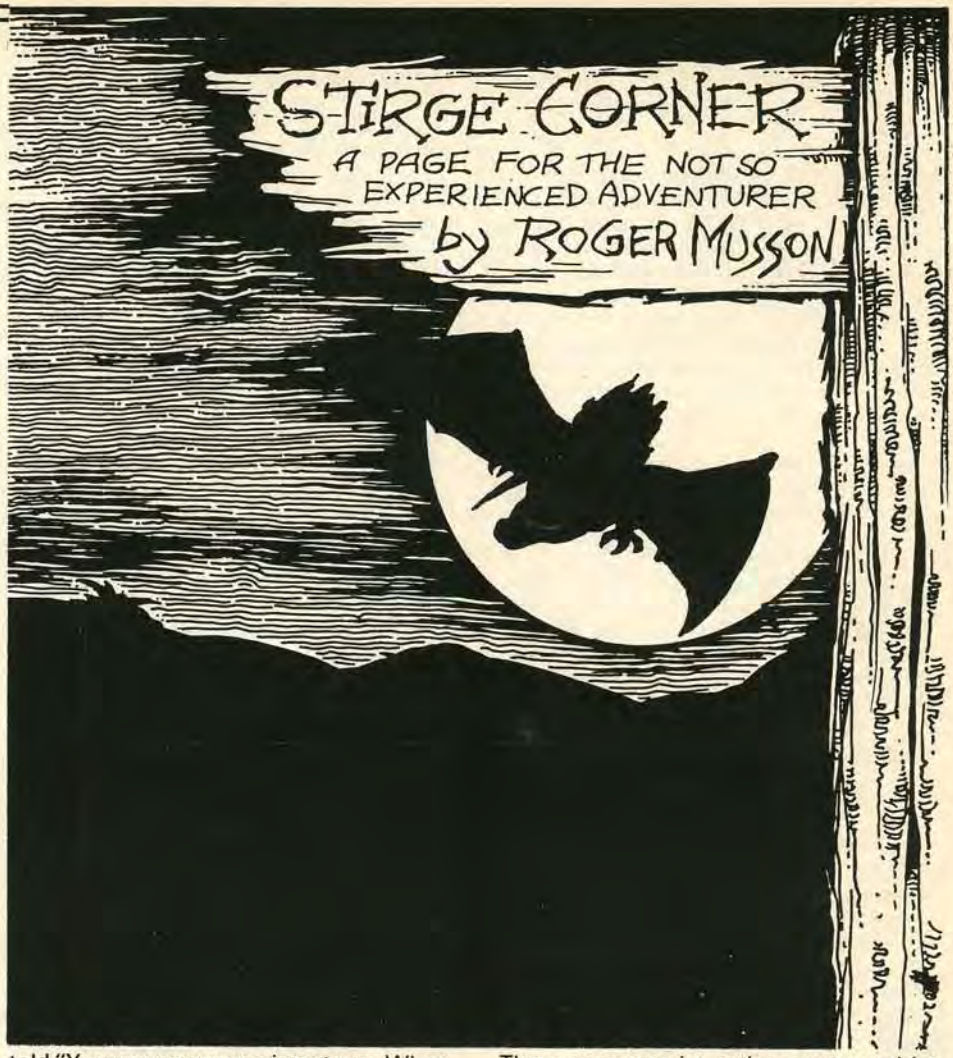
and a special introduction to the
AD&D® BATTLESYSTEM™

RAGNAROK!

IMAGINE™ magazine #30

Special 'How On Earth Will They Follow That' Issue

Beware of letting the fighters dominate the game: vary dungeon design, use fewer monsters and more traps and puzzles.



I dedicate this month's column to that good old workhorse of countless expeditions — the fighter. Who could get on without fighters? As far as combat goes, other classes tend to be specialists. If carrion crawlers attack, it's definitely a case for the magic user and a quick **sleep** spell, and cockatrices and that ilk are perhaps better **fireball**ed than fought hand to hand. Clerics come into their own when facing undead, but apart from that they are second-class citizens in any fight. And thieves may have their moment for slipping around behind a humanoid opponent for a quick knife in the back, but put them in a room with a hell-hound or two and they're not much use.

But fighters will tackle anything, more or less. If a party of characters, after much play, find themselves still deep underground, laden with booty perhaps, but with the spell casters having loosed their spells, then you can bet it will be the fighters who get the party out. Whatever wandering monster is waiting for them round the next corner, be it bugbear or balrog, it will be the fighters in the forefront, ready to tackle all comers.

And this brings me immediately to the point I wish to stress this month — beware of letting the fighters dominate the game. It is easy to fall into the habit of setting up a **D&D®** campaign in such a way that it becomes essentially a long string of fights. In which case, of course, the fighters of the party are in their element, get lots of work, and lots of experience points. The rest of the party trail along in their wake, the cleric waiting hopefully for a few zombies to make their appearance in the endless stream of orcs, kobolds, goblins, hobgoblins, bobhobgoblins and what-have-you that the fighters despatch 'neath their bloody swords; the thief waiting patiently for a chance to disarm a trapped chest — one useful contribution to four hours' play; the magic user doing a good impersonation of a walking torch bracket. And so it goes. The likely result is a party where the fighters are three levels higher than the next highest character of any other class, an unbalanced party, some bored players, and FRP at less than its best.

Of course, there are people who positively revel in hack and slay — the "it's half past three and I haven't killed anything yet" brigade. Far be it from me to deny such folk their fun; I just think that they may have the wrong game; Space Invaders is much better for killing things. I rather like the suggestion made to me by Lou Nisbet for such players — they should be given a character with **plate mail +5** and a **sword +5**, put in a dead end, and told "You see an orc coming at you. When you've killed it you find there's another one just behind. And one behind that. In fact, you are being attacked by an infinite line of orcs in single file. Have fun." Then leave them to it for a few hours.

To avoid falling into this sort of campaign by accident, it is necessary for the DM to do two things: firstly to set up the game so that there is plenty to do besides killing monsters, and secondly, not to fall into the attitude of feeling cheated if characters get away with treasure without losing any hit points.

The problem tends to arise most in games where the chief way to get ahead is by entering dungeon rooms 20' square containing miscellaneous monsters and a chest of treasure. There is never any option but to barge in with a frontal assault, kill the monsters and take the treasure. And of course, the brunt of this action falls upon the fighters. One way to avoid this is to vary dungeon design a lot more — use fewer monsters and more traps and puzzles. A treasure might be rigged up in such a way that the only method of getting at it is by intelligent spell use; particularly some of those more out-of-the-way spells like **warp wood**. One can also design bits of the dungeon in which fighters will be at a disadvantage — flooded areas or narrow tunnels that you can only crawl along (try doing that in plate) which will give other classes the limelight for a while.

Also, of course, there is the matter of sending the players out on missions. These may require rather more sophisticated playing from the party, and allow other classes an equal share of the action. Suppose, for instance, that the players were commissioned to discover the orc's army battle plan. Such a problem would demand a lot more cunning than a straightforward treasure hunt. A really good D&D game will have the players meeting without the DM to discuss plans, work out schemes, and try to formulate the best way to use their various skills to accomplish whatever task is ahead of them.

The DM must also avoid falling into the trap of feeling cheated if the characters find a way of getting to a treasure without having to fight for it. Tricking one's way round a monster instead of fighting it is an established part of the fantasy tradition. DMs should encourage play that gets characters places without losing hit points, rather than fuming at characters 'getting away with something' without the DM being able to shed some of their blood. Always remember, when running an RPG, it's not you against the players. If players beat the monsters, it's not the DM's honour that is at stake.

Ideally a party ought to be able to work as a team; this is made harder if there is a big imbalance in character levels. Sometimes good players simply come together as a team anyway; but it is something that the DM can encourage if adventures are planned well. It is certainly something to avoid discouraging unwittingly.

Roger Musson

IMAGINE magazine interviews
BOB SHAW

Continued from page 17

a book about Pluto and I discovered that it has an unusual relationship with its moon. As I said earlier, an awful lot can come from a very little. This was an instance I was thinking of. I thought what a great setting to put a novel in. The whole thing has grown from that. It should be published in the early part of next year. It might be the first part of a trilogy, but I need to get the Orbitsville novel out of the way first. (Chuckles) Really the plan is always just to write another book.

I Personal freedom and personal identity feature strongly in your books. How important are they to you?

B Personal freedom — yes. I packed up a steady job to become an SF writer and it was simply because I couldn't bear being told what to do. I hated it when a boss would refuse to accept my very good idea and make me work on his rotten idea. (Chuckles) It irked me no end, so I packed it up. Personal freedom and individuality, to me, are paramount.

I Ten years on from becoming a full time writer. Any regrets?

B No. I've had my ups and downs which I knew would happen. I've got a recurrent nightmare even today. I dream that I'm back in the office working for someone else. I'm going through all the misery, and sitting there having to do all the things I hate — wearing a collar and tie, showing up at exactly the same spot at the same time every day and doing things I don't want to do. Then I wake up and realise that it was only a nightmare and that really I'm my own man. That feeling is worth any of the hardships that you get from being a freelance writer.

I What advice would you give a reader of IMAGINE magazine who has aspirations of being an SF writer?

B Read a lot of SF. It's no good sitting down and writing a story where the ship crashes and a man and a woman get out on the verdant pasture and it turns out that they're Adam and Eve. People are still turning out that idea and it's because they haven't read enough. One bit of practical advice as well. Finish everything you start. That's so important for two reasons. Firstly no-one has ever made money out of an unfinished novel or short story. Secondly if you know that you've got to finish it, it makes you very choosy about what you start writing, which is where you should be in the first place.

I How do you categorise your writing? Would a Science Fiction Thriller be a fair description?

B That seems a perfectly viable category to me. And I should know, I've done it. Quite often my books are set five or ten years in the future and just one thing has changed. There is one scientific development. I write that novel about how the change affects some people. I try to write it as if it's not an SF novel, but a novel which would have been regarded as an ordinary novel five or ten years in the future when this development has occurred.

I Have you ever thought of writing outside the genre, for example a mainstream thriller?

B I've thought about it quite often. People who know my work have often remarked that many of my books are close to contemporary thrillers. This is true but I don't know if I'd be happy with a thriller. (Chuckles) If someone offered me a lot of money, then yes I would be. In the thriller field most of the books don't make a lot of money. The ones we've all heard of do, but in between those there are hundreds and hundreds of mediocre books which sink without a trace. I don't want to get involved with that. At least my SF books keep getting reprinted and I have a good chance of living on through my work which I don't think I have outside of it.

I Finally, what do you know about role-playing games?

B I've been aware of them since the earliest days of D&D, but I have never played. It's mainly because my job — writing — is the ultimate game. You write down a word and then, using the most subtle and complex set of rules ever devised, you choose another word and put it beside the first one. And you keep doing that until you have created a world from your own imagination.

Bob Shaw is a very modest man but quietly very proud of his writing, as well he should be. It was a joy to interview him and to know that I was talking to a man who is totally committed to his work, believes in his work and loves his work. It is little wonder that he is much-loved and respected by the fans of the numerous conventions he attends.

***David Hill**, April 1985*

RUBIC OF MOGGEDON
RUBIC SLEPT SOUNDLY FOR SOME MONTHS. BUT THEN...
HA! SO I HAVE FOUND YOU AT LAST!
AWAKE!
AWAKE, I SAY!
HUH... WASSAMARRA...?
AAARGH! 'TIS YOU!
AYE, 'TIS I! AND LONG HAVE I TRACKED YOU, THROUGH BURNING DESERTS LITTERED WITH THE BONES OF MEN, THROUGH FROZEN WASTES IN WHICH NO BRAZEN APE WILL EVER BE A FATHER, ACROSS MOUNTAIN RANGES WHOSE PEAKS TOUCH THE VERY SKY! AND I HAVE PRAYED FOR THE DAY WHEN OUR PATHS WOULD CROSS AGAIN...
FOR TRULY, I HAD NOT REALISED THAT YOU ARE THE RUBIC OF MOGGEDON, EXILED PRINCE OF DOOM, FAMED THROUGHOUT THE SEVEN KINGDOMS FOR YOUR SORCEROUS POWERS AND FLEETNESS OF FOOT! COULD YOU... WOULD YOU SIGN THIS SCROLL? IT'S NOT FOR ME, IT'S FOR MY LITTLE GIRL...
YOU MUST BE KONAN THE AUTOGRAPH HUNTER! TRULY, I MISTOOK YOU FOR YOUR COUSIN!

AUCHTER'S AXE

Ian William for

IT WAS ANOTHER MISERABLE DAY IN THAT STEAMING BOG CALLED ... LITTLE **DOLLOP**.

ICKY SNAILJUICE LEFT HIS SHACK ON THE EAST SIDE TO VISIT THE ADVENTURERS EMPLOYMENT AGENCY...

(SNIFF) GOT ANY WORK?

... BUT MAINLY TO GET SOME FRESH AIR!

THE **GYGAX WRIT** HAD BANNED ALL EASY ADVENTURING. NO WORK ... FOR 1st LEVEL THIEVES.

... AND NOTHING HAD BEEN RIGHT IN LITTLE DOLLOP SINCE THE ARRIVAL OF...

MITZI; A MYSTICAL TRANSVESTITE IN THE GUISE OF A TRAVELLING BALLOON ACT...

AFFECTIONATELY KNOWN AS UNCLE MITZI, UNTIL HIS MAGIC SHOW BEGAN TO INCORPORATE THE **APPEARANCE** OF RABBITS...

YEAH WOW- BUT WHERE'S MY **KID**?

AND THE **DISAPPEARANCE** OF MANY CHILDREN.

MITZI MANOR, A NEO-CUBIST AMALGAM...

...WAS BUILT ON DOLLOP HILL.

AND ONE BRAVE NIGHT THE VILLAGE MEN MARCHED UP TO DEMAND THE RETURN OF THEIR CHILDREN.

THE NEXT NIGHT THE WOMEN WENT UP TO DEMAND THEIR CHILDREN...

.. AND THEIR **HUSBANDS**

RUMOURS GREW— MITZI WAS NOW "THE DEMI-LICH OF DOLLOP"
TERRIBLE SCREAMS WOULD EMANATE FROM WITHIN THOSE WALLS
WHEN WOULD MITZI TIRE OF PUSHING ORCS INTO PITS OF GREEN SLIME — AND START ON THE VILLAGERS?
WITHIN 2 WEEKS THE VILLAGE WAS ALL BUT DESERTED...
BLOP!
ADVENTURERS WERE SOON QUEUING TO DO 'THE TOMB OF HORRORS'... RATHER THAN FACE MITZI.
AND A NEW SILENCE DISTURBED DOLLOP.
HAD MITZI GONE INTO DEPRESSION... OR MADNESS?
AIEEEEE!
EVEN THE APPOINTMENT OF HARPIES HAD...
...FAILED TO 'BRING IN THE TRADE'
THE HALFLING CONTINGENT DEVISED A WHITE LIE ABOUT AN 'ORC ON THE HILL' WHO'D STOLEN THEIR 'DIAMOND OF DOLLOP.'
MANY FELL FOR IT...
UNTIL THE LAST 15TH LEVEL PALADIN ALMOST MADE IT BACK... TO WRING THEIR 'LYING NECKS!'
SO THE HALFLINGS COOLED IT—AND THE FLOW OF ADVENTURERS QUICKLY DRIED UP.
SO, WERE THE RUMOURS TRUE? HAD THEY BLOWN IT ALL OUT OF PROPORTION? WAS MITZI'S INFAMY BASED UPON THE CLEVER APPLICATION OF A COUPLE OF 3RD LEVEL SPELLS?
WAS MITZI DEAD? MAD? ... OR WAS THERE SOMETHING ELSE UP THERE?!
AND WHERE COULD THEY FIND ANYONE STUPID ENOUGH TO FIND OUT?
THEN, ONE DAY, A BAD SMELL AROSE FROM THE WEST..
DEMANDING THE PRESENCE OF A "WIZ'D WI' BIG EARS" AND MUMBLING ABOUT A DRAGON...
... ITS NAME WAS AUCHTER
NEXT: THE ALLIANCE

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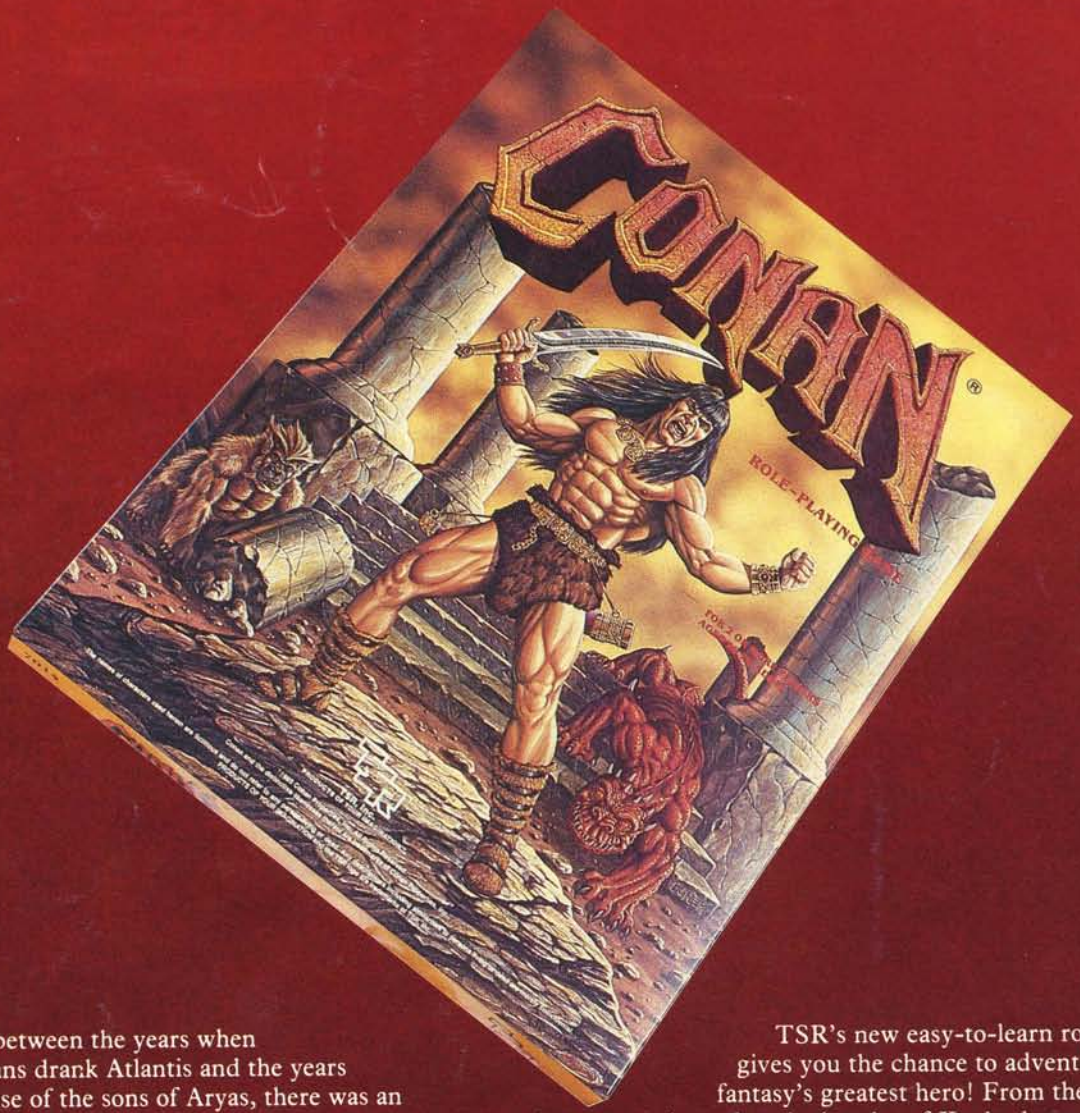
Know then, O Prince....



....that between the years when the oceans drank Atlantis and the years of the rise of the sons of Aryas, there was an age undreamed of, when shining kingdoms lay spread across the world like blue mantles beneath the stars. Hither came Conan the Cimmerian, black-haired, sullen-eyed, sword in hand. A thief, a reaver, a slayer to tread the jewelled thrones of the Earth beneath his sandled feet.

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